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Spiritual, But Not Religious: Fostering Conversations in the Military System

Angela L. Caruso-Yahne

Upaya Zen Center

Chaplaincy Training Cohort Five

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Abstract

All members of the U.S. Air Force are expected to maintain a high level of readiness including technical skill, physical fitness, mental readiness and spiritual readiness to accomplish the mission. Feedback is frequently provided to Airmen as are supportive resources in the areas of technical, physical and mental readiness. Supervisors are supplied methods by which to engage subordinates in order to assess and support such readiness. Spirituality, however, is a largely overlooked and comparatively unsupported area of Airman Readiness. In order to overcome issues which challenge assessment of spiritual readiness such as separation of Church and State and assessment of those who do not identify as religious, supervisors must be provided structure and means for discussions which protect the rights of all servicemembers to practice any particular faith or no faith and yet upholds the Air Force doctrinal mandate to ensure spiritual readiness to accomplish the mission. These spiritual readiness feedback conversations are rooted in bearing witness to the current conditions of spirituality in Airmen and are characterized by openness, compassion and engagement. The instrument for supervisors to assess spiritual readiness and provide helpful feedback to Airmen is easily implementable and companionable to the already established framework of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program.

Introduction

During the occasion of my annual medical exam and certification to continue in an aviation career, a military flight surgeon reviewed my extensive deployment record. He turned pages containing accounts of exposure to many combat zones, frequent nearby mortar and rocket explosions, aircraft emergencies, graphic traumatic injuries and death of other servicemembers. Noting that despite this history I was able to continue work and be essentially emotionally well, the physician quipped, “How do you *not* have PTSD?” Beyond the intentional infusion of humor was the irony of the moment. We both understood that my experience of these situations and traumas was not unique or even uncommon for current members of the Air Force. What was uncommon was the outcome. It was a tacit acknowledgement that the conditions of service often come at a high cost to the military service member’s spirit. Despite significant improvements to the military healthcare and mental health care systems, there is often deep suffering in the hearts and minds of veterans unaddressed in these venues. I believe this suffering is rooted in the tension of being a spiritual being in a system that does not recognize or affirm this condition. The military servicemember exists in a system which diminishes his or her sense of humanity.

The ability to tolerate these types of military experiences is a product of spiritual practices, expressions, and the systems which support them. Soon after my enlistment and qualification as an Aeromedical Evacuation Technician, combat operations began in Afghanistan. With youthful energy and exceptional training, I was eager to do the work of a military flight medic and I was deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. At that time my spiritual practices, which were the product of my very active background in Protestant Christianity and an interest and curiosity about Western Buddhism, were

undeveloped and idle due to being given very little attention in the preceding few years. Because I did not resonate with the mostly conservative, traditional faith practices represented by military chapel services, my spiritual wellness was unsupported in the military system. I also did not have a well-established practice at that time which could be sustained as spiritual self-care. While I was very successful in terms of skill performance and technical knowledge, my internal state was anxious and exhausted.

Through study and practice I began to find a way of being that allowed me to be incredibly present to the very moment and even to the suffering of others without increasing my own suffering and the suffering of those in my life. I could be still and grounded despite the turbulent and traumatic situations. Instead of finding anxiety and exhaustion in the mission, I found compassion and a kind of happiness that seemed beyond the self in the gentle acknowledgement and relief of suffering. I found a home and a great deal of support in silent meditation, compassion practices and intentional awareness along with Buddhist teachings. While my own spiritual wellness is clearly supported by these religious practices, I believe that spiritual wellness is not the outcome of one particular religion. I do not believe that there is a recipe for spiritual wellness in the U.S. Air Force or that spiritual readiness comes in the form any particular practice. I do believe that each individual Airmen deserves to have his or her own spiritual nature acknowledged, respected and supported and that this leads to their own spiritual awareness, wellness and readiness.

This has been the impetus for my exploration of chaplaincy and my return to training for service as clergy. Having an awareness of this state of suffering is an opportunity to diminish it. Through the study of Buddhist Chaplaincy at Upaya Zen Center, I understand that the military member, including his or her spiritual state, is part of an open system,

susceptible to change by introducing change to any point of the system. However, change that serves to alleviate suffering is not rooted in pre-determined outcomes or pre-conceived notions of the method of change. By utilizing the tenets of bearing witness to the situation as it actually is and not-knowing in the sense of not having the answer at hand in order to produce a spiritually well Airman, the compassion arises. As Rabbi Malka Drucker stated during a lecture at Upaya Zen Center, “The presence of compassion changes a moment, and a moment changes a person, and a person changes a system.”

The recognition of the benefits of spiritual wellness is not a new concept to the military; however these wellness practices are not supported by the military system for the majority of Airmen who do not choose to self-engage with existing religious institutions within the military. So the question raised is this: How do we support these Airmen’s spiritual practices in order to foster a deeper sense of equanimity and decrease their risk of unhealthy responses to stress? This serves not only their readiness to perform the mission but their own comprehensive wellness and experience of wholeness.

Behaviors which indicate flexibility and resilience under stress are a demonstration of the function of spiritual wellness in a military servicemember. These attributes are desirable in the individual serving Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine. Although the U.S Air Force has articulated in several doctrinal formats that spirituality is part of the duty of each servicemember, there is little support for those who do not engage with traditional expressions of religious spirituality. This mandate of spiritual readiness in the Air Force actually represents the possibility to intercede in the system. Immediate supervisors are relied upon to determine the readiness, including spiritual wellness, of Airmen to perform a mission. By empowering them to engage in essential conversations or basic assessments to determine such readiness

and support the wholeness of those they supervise, Airmen are given permission to experience and embrace their own spiritual state.

Beyond the benefits to the military of having a more flexible and higher-performance set of servicemembers is the benefit to our global society of having a clearer and more integrated person in the position to affect the military system. By encouraging spiritual awareness, practice, and expression in each individual Airmen, suffering in the forms of addiction, violence, post traumatic stress, and deterioration of ethical conduct is reduced.

In order to provide an environment of spiritual support to these Airmen, a method of appraisal and sustainment which promotes wellness without infringing upon the rights of Airmen to practice any particular faith or no faith at all must be developed and put into operation. This can be accomplished by creating an appropriate, clearly understood, universally applicable and easily implemented foundation for dialogue between an Airman and his or her direct supervisor. This sort of open-state listening without agenda is the avenue for bearing witness and not-knowing. The Airman finds that with this sort of gentle support, the path to spiritual wellness can be found and is not administered.

Review of Literature and Background

Spirituality and Religion in the U.S. Military

Spirituality and religion have been a part of the composition of the military since its inception. This is reflected in the culture and in the formal and informal structure of the military system. Even phrases such as “there are no atheists in foxholes” and “for God and country” are a regular part of the military vernacular. More formalized references to religion

exist in the key doctrines of the military from the moment of enlistment - a ritual which culminates with an oath ending in the words “so help me God.” - to change of command ceremonies which commonly feature a prayer or homily from a military chaplain (10 U.S.C. § 502). Alongside the education on the Geneva Conventions, differences in treatment of combatants and non-combatants, and internationally protected symbols such as the Red Crescent and Red Cross, Airmen are taught their duties if captured or held prisoner which include a Code of Conduct clause “I will trust in my God and in the United States of America.” (Exec. Order No. 10631). These tones of a spiritual connection to military service run deep in the history of the U.S. Armed Forces.

The institution of the military has an internal organization in place to ensure that the spiritual lives of its members are not neglected. Beginning in July of 1775 when the Continental Congress authorized one chaplain for each regiment of the Continental Army, Chaplains have been a part of the institution of the U.S. Military (as cited in *The Military Chaplain*, n.d.). When the U.S. Air Force became a branch of the military in 1947, the transition of Army Air Corps Chaplains was the establishment of chaplaincy in the Air Force. Today, the mission of the Air Force Chaplains’ Service is to conduct religious observances, provide pastoral care, and offer advice to leaders on spiritual, ethical, moral, morale, and religious accommodation issues. (Chaplain Service, 2006). Chaplains serve and minister with the whole of the Air Force extending to the families of Airmen and non-military personnel who work in the military system.

Chaplains, who are all commissioned officers, wear both the rank insignia of their paygrade such as Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, etc., and the chaplain insignia of their faith group. The currently authorized Chaplain occupational badges are: the Buddhist

Dharma Wheel, the Christian Cross, the Jewish Tablet of The Ten Commandments and the Muslim Crescent Moon. These badges are worn above any other badges on the uniform. Only missile, aviation, space and chaplain badges are required to always be displayed on the uniforms. Other career fields have the option of wearing or not wearing occupational badges. Chaplains also wear their religious insignia in the place of rank on hats and on one side of the collar making their position as spiritual care providers highly visible in comparison to other Air Force Officers (Dress and Appearance of Air Force Personnel, 2011).

The Air Force, similarly to the other branches, views religion as a highly personal matter. Chaplains are commissioned to provide religious guidance to and facilitate the particular religious observances for their own faith groups, but also to provide spiritual care for all members of the Air Force comprised of a diverse set of faith expressions. The Department of Defense defines religion in this way: “A personal set or institutionalized system of attitudes, moral or ethical beliefs, and practices that are held with the strength of traditional religious views, characterized by ardor and faith, and generally evidenced through specific religious observances” (Equal Opportunity, 1995, p. 18). Distinct language defining “spiritual” or “spirituality” is not easy to find in military publications. An article in the “Wingman Toolkit” online resource base for Reservists notes:

“Of the four pieces of the total fitness puzzle, spiritual fitness might be the most difficult to define. For some, spirituality is a belief in a power operating in the universe that is greater than oneself. For others, it’s a sense of interconnectedness with all living creatures. For still others, it’s an awareness of the purpose and meaning of life” (Comprehensive Airman Fitness, n.d.).

The same article also points to Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* as a guide to clarifying spirituality as a concept. Although "spiritual" is not specifically defined, there are several references to "spiritual readiness" and "spiritual wellness". In Air Force terms, spiritual wellness is the ability to sustain a sense of wellbeing and purpose through a set of spiritual beliefs, principles or values (Comprehensive Airman Fitness, n.d.). It is incumbent upon the Military Chaplain to provide both spiritual care and religious support, but to be clear about and respectful of the boundaries of the two in order to provide the highest standard of care for service members.

While supporting a diverse population of Airmen who may have a religious identity of their own, Chaplains are also duty bound to the ethics and precepts of their own traditions and to the religious bodies which provide their ecclesiastical endorsements. Chaplains must act in accord with these principles while serving in the military system. This can present a complex predicament when spiritual care is requested by an individual whose religious affiliation differs from that of the available chaplain. For instance, when seeking the care of a Chaplain concerning thoughts of suicide, an Airman may be counseled by a Chaplain of his or her own same religious affiliation about the faith-specific tenets regarding suicide. However, a Chaplain of the Airman's same faith may not be available as is often the case in deployed or remote locations. Likewise, the Airman may not be affiliated with any specific religious tradition but may seek a Chaplain's assistance in crisis. In these cases the Airman will be supported and generally counseled by the Chaplain who may recuse himself or herself if the Airman seeks absolution for suicide or other spiritual support which is not in accordance with the Chaplain's own religious principles.

Separation of Church and State

One key reason that the military is cautious about defining spirituality and religion and about its support of faith groups is the separation of Church and State. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution regards religion in two ways: It protects the rights of Americans to practice and express their own religion without unreasonable interference by the government and it prevents the establishment of a State religion or preference of the government for any particular faith (U.S. Const. amend. I). These two ideals do not seem particularly at odds with one another until a system such as the military is examined.

Servicemembers, to the same extent as any other citizen, have the right to freedom of religious expression. This is held carefully in balance with the fact that the military is a governmental institution. How can this institution simultaneously demonstrate a commitment to support the rights of the religious individuals of which it is comprised and not favor any specific faith or religion at large? Making space for religious expression can have the unintended consequence of allowing room for proselytizing and unwanted social pressure to conform to the perceived majority spiritual practice or trend. This can create dilemmas for those at all levels of command and responsibility. For example, allowing a unit member to offer a prayer or blessing at a military sponsored event, even if attendance is not mandatory, could be interpreted by other members as infringement on their rights to be free from religion and yet others could interpret a prohibition on prayer at the event as a limit on their freedom of expression. The risk of appearance of endorsement seems to overarch the issue of freedom of religious expression. This is helpful in protecting the freedoms of Airmen, but it can also be restrictive to their full spiritual experience. In this way spirituality can be reduced to that which is exclusively religious and compartmentalized to Chaplain Services.

Commanders and supervisors may disregard spirituality as not only the work of only Chaplains, but expressly beyond the limits of what they legally may acknowledge or discuss.

Civil rights are protected at many levels within the Air Force. In addition to the roles of military Chaplains, Commanders and supervisors as advocates for their Airmen, the Office of Military Equal Opportunity (MEO) is established to ensure that Airmen are treated fairly and free of unlawful discrimination. Often compared to the Human Relations departments of civilian organizations, MEO handles issues of alleged harassment, favoritism, and complaints of reprisal. Issues of discrimination may be complicated in that military service has certain unique characteristics and that Congress has exempted military members from numerous labor and civil rights statutes applicable to civilian employees (Equal Opportunity, 1995).

Defining Terms

Inclusion of spirituality as a concern at the unit level is an edgy issue and the definition of “spirituality” and “religious” seem to be at the core of the matter. In communication with the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), a not-for-profit organization in support of separation of Church and State, it is clear that for many these terms are synonymous and that spiritual cannot be held as separate from religious. The MRFF’s stance is that any assessment of spirituality is unconstitutional as it violates the intent of the First Amendment or that it establishes an appraisal which violates Article VI of the U.S. Constitution which states “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” (U.S. Const. art VI § 3). They and their supporters very strongly oppose any discussion of a spiritual nature which involves the chain of command and feel that those issues are reserved only for religious personnel and

chaplains. While supporters of the MRFF define spirituality in ways which range from synonymous with religion to pure superstition, they seem to have overlooked another much broader and more inclusive meaning which can include religion but certainly has value for those whose practices are not expressly religious (M Weinstein, personal communication, 2013).

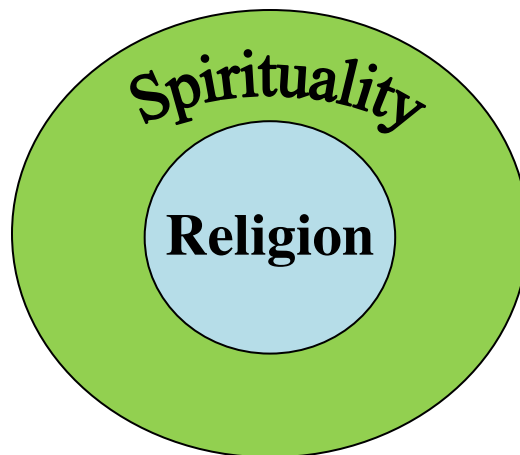
For the purposes of this project, a definition of “religious” that aligns with the DoD definition is used in that traditionally religious practices having specific form or observance that is common to a religious faith can be characterized as religious. When practices and beliefs of an individual include faith-specific language, intercession of a clergy, or relate to a deity or key prophet, etc., these are viewed as religious.

The Air Force Chaplain Service definition of “Spiritual Health” is used as a guide to understand what is spiritual.

“Spiritual Health - A vital component of human wellness. It is that within us which motivates us in life and gives us strength and resiliency. It addresses questions such as meaning, purpose, values, self-worth, dignity, and hope. It promotes healthy interpersonal relationships, responsible living and the ability to respond effectively to stress, hardship, and tragedy. Spiritual health is not synonymous with religious health. An individual's spiritual health may, by personal choice, incorporate religious belief, just as it may be grounded in other concepts such as patriotism or the common good.” (Chaplain Service, 2006. p.5)

All practices which allow the individual to sense and express fullness of life and happiness and provide strength and comfort in times of stress, both those which are not and

those that are not expressly religious in nature are understood to be spiritual. While religious expressions and practices are within the scope of spirituality, many spiritual expressions and practices are not religious. Examining these definitions and including training will help supervisors to understand that non-religious Airmen and those who express their identities as Atheists are also spiritual individuals and not exempt from this element of readiness. In conversation with one Non-Commissioned Officer about how to discuss readiness, she asked if the conversation about spirituality was at an impasse with the Airman who is Atheist. She was encouraged to ask questions about what gives him or her the passion to serve and the energy to persevere through challenges and set-backs. This opens up the conversation to non-religious spirituality such as camaraderie, the sense of patriotism, etc.

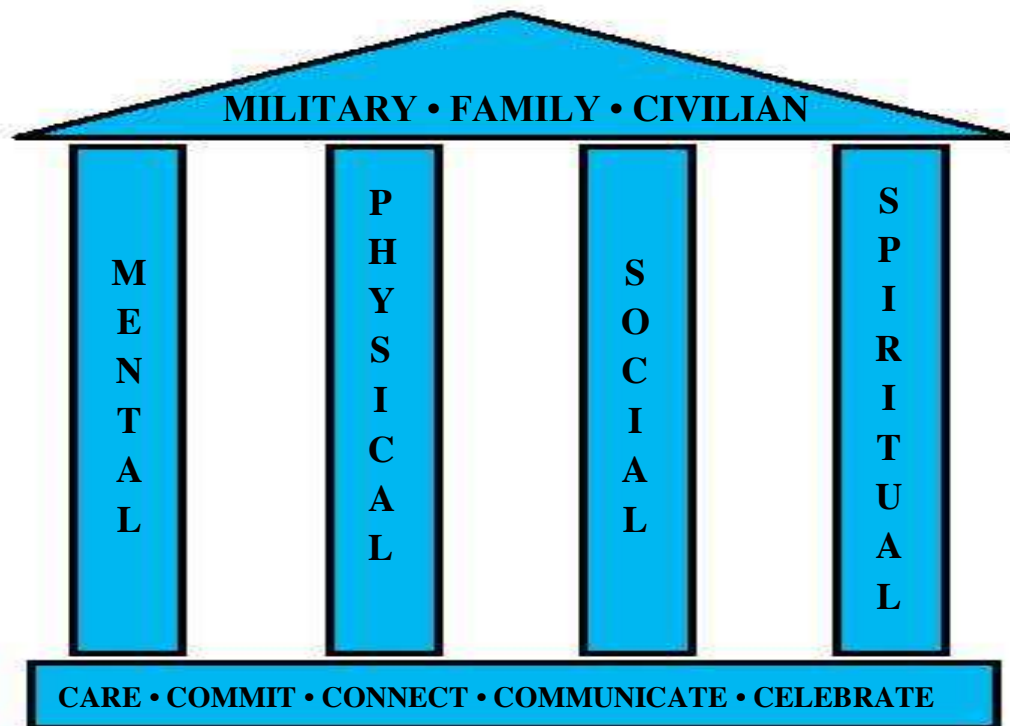


Compulsory Spirituality in the Air Force

No specific faith can be officially endorsed by the military and, being a governmental institution, it must protect the rights of Airmen to practice any religion or no religion at all. To that end, the Air Force does expressly stipulate spirituality as having any certain form. Some of the directives regarding spirituality are informal, such as the Comprehensive

Airman Fitness program, and other directives are binding, formal components of military regulation such as The Enlisted Force Structure.

The Comprehensive Airman Fitness (n.d.) program uses a visualization of the columns which support the wellbeing of an individual's life in three aspects: military, family and civilian. There are four support pillars: mental, physical, social, spiritual. These pillars stand on a foundation of what is known as "The 5 C's": Care, Commit, Connect, Communicate, and Celebrate. This model represents the Air Force understanding that in order to have whole, well members of the military, civilian communities and healthy families, individual servicemembers must be well in the mental, physical social and spiritual aspects of their lives. In addition to being one of the pillars of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program which is endorsed at the highest levels of command and leadership, spirituality is included in regulatory instructions.



Air Force indoctrination beginning with Basic Training prominently features two pocket-sized pamphlets, one brown and one blue. The “Little Blue Book” is entitled The United States Air Force Core Values. This is the first item placed in the hands of Enlisted Airmen as they enter the Basic Training system. It expounds on the system of beliefs first learned by every Airman: integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do (United States Air Force Core Values, 1997).

Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2618 is often referred to as “the Little Brown Book.” The Little Brown Book being much more formal in structure than its blue companion document is headlined with the Air Force seal. This booklet titled “The Enlisted Force Structure” begins as other AFI’s do with the boldface capital letter heading “COMPLIANCE WITH THIS PUBLICATION IS MANDATORY” and continues to describe its purpose:

“This instruction defines the enlisted force structure and implements AFD 36-26, *Total Force Development*. It establishes leadership and development levels, responsibilities, and official terms of address for enlisted Airmen... Additionally, this instruction includes the Air Force institutional competencies which serve as the common language for force development. This instruction applies to all enlisted members of the US Air Force, Air National Guard (ANG) and Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC).” (Enlisted Force Structure, 2009).

This document outlines the general military responsibilities for all Enlisted Airmen. These duties are grouped into three tiers. Junior Enlisted are given the most specific instructions for developing as Airmen and entering the military culture. Non-Commissioned

Officers or NCOs are introduced to supervisory responsibility while Senior NCOs are directed in management and leadership. These instructions are comprehensive and compounding. NCOs are expected to maintain the standards of Junior Enlisted and Senior NCOs must embody Airmanship at all levels.

Among the responsibilities listed for Junior Enlisted servicemembers is the order to “be spiritually ready to accomplish the mission. Spiritual readiness is the development of those personal qualities needed to help a person through times of stress, hardship, and tragedy. Spiritual readiness may or may not include religious activities.” NCO’s are additionally charged with ensuring the readiness of Airmen whom they supervise and providing assistance to “subordinates who may be struggling with their spiritual readiness” (Enlisted Force Structure, 2009). This is the most prominent declaration of compulsory spirituality in Air Force doctrine and is listed among four components of readiness, the other three being physical readiness, mental readiness and technical readiness.

Benefits of Empowering Airmen with Spiritual Readiness and Wellness

There are many reasons why the Air Force would find it desirable to empower its Airmen with spiritual wellness or spiritual fitness. In addition to the resilience of individuals, which has become a hot-topic following the frequent repeated deployments of Airmen to combat zones in Afghanistan and Iraq over the recent ten-year span, there are significant issues of ethics which currently create a great deal of suffering among Air Force personnel. By nature of being spiritual beings, humans sense their commonality and connection. This sense is undermined by the opposing information. In a system where people are easily

dehumanized by being regarded as “the human weapon system” and often referred to by only their rank or function, fostering spirituality and making space for spiritual expression within the context of military service is key in overcoming ethical issues (Maintaining the Human Weapon System, 2009).

Spiritual practice is part of adaptive behavior. In groups, having a sense of common values and rituals helps to form bonds. This sense is deepened when spirituality is brought out of its obscured state and attended, and witnessed (Galanter, 2005). Although it may often be unapparent, life inside of the military is no less spiritual than life outside the military. Because of the near proximity to acts of war and the spiritual distress caused by participation, the spiritual aspects of life in the forms of existential questions, grief and anxiety may be even more palpable in the military environment than in other work (Tick, 2005). These spiritual states occur in all of humanity whether or not the individual identifies as religious or chooses to work through these states with the assistance of clergy or faith-based systems and practices.

Like so many communities outside of the military, the Air Force has been plagued by sexual assault and domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicide and ethics violations by leadership (Ryan, 2012). These events are symptomatic of the spiritual state of the servicemembers who comprise the system.

When Airmen are supported by a system that recognizes their spiritual nature and encourage full wellness of these individuals, Airmen will have a heightened awareness of their interconnectedness and wholeness. This awareness promotes pro-social behavior, ethical actions, community building, trust and interpersonal decency. These ethics dove-tail

well with the ethics of military culture which emphasizes service, honor, duty, etc. Allowing spiritual expression and promoting spiritual wellness provides and supports rituals for healing and experiencing connection. These spiritual practices lead to fulfillment of the higher echelons of Maslow's Hierarch of Human Needs such as "esteem" and "self-actualization". Spiritual health is demonstrated with other aspects of wellness. Spiritual practices positively influence immune, cardiovascular, hormonal and nervous systems and tend to improve coping skills and social support, foster feelings of optimism and hope, promote healthy behavior, reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, and encourage a sense of relaxation (Spiritual Fitness and a Sense of Purpose, n.d.).

Airmen deserve to know that the Air Force is invested in their whole wellbeing, not only their job performance, and that their supervisors and commanders are genuinely interested in their welfare. Supporting the spiritual wellness of individual Airmen demonstrates this investment and interest. It also helps reflect the importance and value of an Airman's own spiritual practices to him or her. By conveying that all aspects of his or her spirituality - not just those which are of a religious tone - are valuable, these Airmen are endowed by their supervisors with purpose and permission to nurture these important practices.

Barriers to Assessment of Spiritual Readiness in the U.S. Air Force

A problem frequently cited in the assessment of healthy spiritual development of Airmen by supervisors is the separation of Church and State. Airmen at all levels state that they fear that having discussions around spirituality will lead to violations of First

Amendment rights and subsequent discipline. Supervisors also state that they do not feel there is an opportunity for discussion of religious matters when those they supervise have a religious affiliation or spiritual practice which is different than their own (Anonymous, 2013).

Another byproduct of the Separation of Church and State in assessment of spiritual readiness is the lack of visibility of spiritual issues to the chain of command. Chaplains are completely removed from the chain of command for those who seek out their assistance. Airmen who are concerned that disclosure of an issue to command would jeopardize their progression to higher ranks, security clearance or respect within the unit may seek out a Chaplain for support. Airmen who fear disclosure may not otherwise engage with mental healthcare providers who are not bound by the same strict rules of confidentiality vested in Chaplains in the military. In general, the confidential nature of use of chaplain services is beneficial in that it protects servicemembers from reprisal for seeking assistance in times of distress. However, the complete lack of awareness of the comprehensive readiness of an individual contributes to harm by allowing the Airman to be placed in situations which he or she is not equipped to tolerate. These situations then become damaging not only to that Airman, but to the others impacted by the mission. A commander would not allow an Airman to deploy into combat conditions if he or she did not meet the physical fitness standard because this Airman could be injured or injure others in the performance of his or her duties. The physical fitness, professional skills and technical ability of servicemembers are reported to the unit commander and these data are highly visible at all levels of military leadership. This is the way in which decision makers gauge the feasibility of entering into military operations. Spiritual readiness, although mandated in the same way as these other

dimensions of preparedness for performance of the mission, is not assessed, not reported, not visible and not considered when making these decisions. Because protection of the Airman's rights under the First Amendment is paramount, a very sensitive approach to assessment which keeps the individual empowered to determine his or her own spiritual and religious practices is required.

The military operates out of strong pride in history, norm and convention. Although these values provide stability and continuity which is required to generate function in a system which is comprised of such a large number of individuals, it also produces resistance to outlying ideas. For this reason, it can be difficult to introduce change to the system. The Airman's Creed features the phrase "I am faithful to a proud heritage, a tradition of honor and a legacy of valor." (Enlisted Force Structure, 2009, p. 22). These words are very indicative of the value that is placed on tradition in the Air Force. Because spiritual assessment historically has not been a part of the methods by which Airmen are vetted as being ready and fit for service, that assessment is viewed as unnecessary and an encroachment on the values of the existing practices.

The value of tradition in the military is occasionally intertwined with "traditional values." This is the argument that, despite the clear institutional statements otherwise, the U.S. Armed Forces was founded on Christian religious principles to which it should hold. This position produces barriers to the assessment of wellness in the many servicemembers who do not identify with more conservative Christian practices. This is similar to the problem for appraisal of spirituality in a system which has an association with a social and political identity of conservative values which do not support minority religious expression. Unauthorized proselytizing is not unknown in the military and therefore any conduct of

supervisors to assess spiritual readiness of Airmen presents a vulnerability, particularly to those whose faith differs from their supervisor's.

Servicemembers express that Chaplains are viewed as unrelatable and unapproachable due to the disparity in rank. The ranks which Chaplains hold are the objects of esteem and require shows of respect such as salutes, standing at the position of attention and terms of address which are designed to call attention to the difference in standing of Enlisted Airmen and these officers. Also, the affiliation of a chaplain with a specific faith community can cause a sense of separation in the Airman who questions his or her worthiness in the context or perceived context of that religion. Data from 2009 reflects that representation of faith groups in military Chaplains is disproportionate to the composition of the military lending some validity to this sense. A combined 48.8% of servicemembers stated a religious affiliation with Protestant Christian organizations and 20.2% as Catholic with the remainder of nearly one-third stating other religious affiliation or no religious affiliation. The military Chaplain Corps is comprised of 88.5% Protestant Christian and 9.4% Catholic Chaplains. Other practitioners of Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Wicca, Native American Spirituality or Hinduism as well as non-theists such as Unitarian Universalists are served by the 2.1% of Chaplains who are not affiliated with the Christian Church (Briefing to White House Officials, 2009). Airmen who do not have a faith language or do not identify with the institution or practices of the Chaplain who wears religious garb or a badge may not feel that their spiritual issues can be addressed with the Chaplain.

The most direct barrier to assessment of spiritual readiness is that supervisors have not been trained in and given resources for measurement of this important aspect of wellness and readiness. In all the enlisted career fields of Air Force service, there are clear standards

of readiness to perform duties. Physical Fitness is evaluated when the Airman demonstrates the ability to perform strength and cardiovascular exercises during testing every six months. Airmen with physically demanding duties are constantly evaluated by their peers and supervisors who observe their performance. Those who are not able to safely execute their functions are not deployed or placed in missions which could cause them harm. Technical readiness is guaranteed by frequent re-qualification and scrutinized performance in realistic exercise conditions. Technical skill is an area of constant mentoring and improvement throughout an Airman's career. There are continuing education requirements and exams in each career field and these levels of technical expertise establish the readiness of an individual to perform duties without direct supervision or in deployed settings. An Airman's mental readiness is ensured by providing extensive programs for substance abuse prevention and continued emphasis on situational awareness and stress relief. Attention to detail as an assessment of mental readiness is an area of emphasis at all levels of Airman training, performance and evaluation.

Currently the only method by which an Airman can evaluate his or her own spiritual readiness as described in the "Little Brown Book" or the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program is to self-engage with a web-based comprehensive fitness assessment which includes a spiritual component or to discuss spirituality with a Chaplain or civilian religious or spiritual leader. The web-based assessment is not well known or easily accessible and is not likely to be utilized. Either of these methods leaves any reporting solely in the hands of the Airman. While the specific spiritual and religious needs of the individual are clearly a personal matter and any suggestion of a particular remedy would likely infringe on the First Amendment rights of the Airman, the evaluation of readiness in all areas, including spiritual

readiness, is the joint responsibility of the supervisor and the Airman. This cannot be accomplished with the current system.

Caring for the Spiritual Non-Religious Airman

Religious matters clearly and appropriately lie within the realm of Chaplain Services in the military. However, one must be cautious not to equate all of spiritual wellness with the duties of the Chaplain as this leads to the neglect of so many aspects of the whole Airman.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama states in *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (2012),

“More fundamental than religion, therefore, is our basic human spirituality.

We have an underlying disposition toward love, kindness, and affection, irrespective of whether we have a religious framework or not. When we nurture this most fundamental human resource - when we set about cultivating those inner values which we all appreciate in others - then we start to live spiritually. The challenge, therefore, is to find a way of grounding ethics and supporting the cultivation of inner values that is in keeping with the scientific age, while not neglecting the deeper needs of the human spirit, which, for many people, religion answers.”

Airmen who engage with religious resources in the military may suppose that the whole of their spirituality is encompassed by these events and associations. They may also believe that military colleagues who do not engage in the same way are not having spiritual experiences. Likewise those Airmen who do not participate in Chaplaincy Services sponsored activities in the military may not be able to identify their own spiritual practices.

Those outside the circle of institutional chaplaincy or religious services - such as supervisors and military mental health care providers - must facilitate Airmen's recognition of spiritual practices and needs. While spirituality can be experienced from either a secular or religious standpoint, those practices in life that are not focused on theistic or formal religious beliefs significantly contribute to making life meaningful and resilience of spirit (Galanter, 2005).

Airmen also need support of these less formalized spiritual practices from supervisors and commanders. If individuals find that their readiness is supported by having time for spending time in nature or talking to family then it is the duty of the supervisor to ensure that these readiness-promoting activities are held in the same esteem as attendance of religious services. When Airmen express to their supervisors that they use conversation with trusted, close friends to celebrate life events and process issues of grief and loss, these conversations must be regarded as sacred in the sense that they are "highly valued, important and deserving of great respect" as "sacred" is defined by Merriam-Webster (2003). Commanders and supervisors can support the broadly spiritual habits of those in the unit and help them to witness the common spiritual nature shared by those who engage in military service. Practices such as military ceremony demonstrate common values and the shared experience of a spiritual nature. (Galanter, 2005) (Tick, 2005).

Currently Available Resources

The resources currently available to Airmen to promote and support their spiritual wellness and readiness include the services of military Chaplains and mental health care providers. Some of the challenges with those resources have already been identified.

Airmen remain fearful that requests for assistance with issues of a spiritual nature will lead to

duty restrictions, referral to mental health and being socially ostracized. Supervisors do not broach the subject of spiritual readiness with their Airmen because they are not trained regarding Separation of Church and State and errantly believe that the conversation will result in referral to the Air Force's equivalent of civilian corporate Human Resources, the Office of Military Equal Opportunity. "I don't want to end up in MEO" is an often reported rationale for not checking the spiritual welfare of other Airmen. The military culture is often viewed as being under the banner of conservative principles and those with differing values may not feel that they are represented or have a voice. Because supervisors have no training in or history with connecting Airmen with spiritual resources, there is no established language for it and the opportunity often passes unused and without benefit.

The Air Force Reserve Command's "Wingman Toolkit" website lists many resources under the four pillars of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program. As of 20 Aug 2013 there were 24 items listed for Physical support. They included Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous contact numbers, many resources for physical fitness programs and nutrition education. Mental support had 70 items mostly regarding suicide prevention and awareness and links for the Centers for Disease Control mental health resources. There were more than one hundred items listed for Social support. They were wide ranging from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration website to job searching, college education, marriage counseling, childcare and the American Red Cross. The same website had only sixteen resources listed for Spiritual support. All of these items were supported by the military Chaplain Corps or civilian Catholic Services (Wingman Toolkit Resources, n.d.).

While the Wingman Toolkit Resource listing is an excellent and fairly comprehensive list of services for supporting Airman wellness, there is significant disparity in the number of

services available to Airman for spiritual support as compared to the other aspects of wellness. For those reluctant to engage with traditional religious resources, this disparity is even greater. It is reasonable to believe that some of the resources, such as physical fitness and counseling which are listed in other areas, could meet the spiritual needs of Airmen as well. However, not addressing these as spiritual resources diminishes their value and recognition as spiritual components. Further reinforcing that “spiritual” and “religious” are synonymous by only listing religious resources under the heading spiritual continues to make it difficult for Airmen at all level to understand the breadth of spiritual expression, practice and resource outside of the structure of religious organizations.

Spiritual resources tend to be in many ways reactive rather than proactive. The guidance given to supervisors and commanders is to be alert to signs of unwellness in their Airmen and respond appropriately, usually with a referral to the Chaplain or to mental health services. There is a booklet entitled “Air Force Leader’s Guide for Managing Personnel in Distress.” (2009). This booklet is designed to be a quick reference guide for actions to take when supervising an individual faced with death of a loved one, domestic violence or sexual assault, substance abuse and family crisis. It is very pragmatic and the guidelines generally include removal from sensitive duties such as access to classified information or weapons and referral to medical or mental healthcare professionals. It also encourages supervisors to be vigilant about seeking assistance for individuals who are at risk for suicide.

There are no currently available resources for spiritual wellness which make collaborators of Airmen and their supervisors in order to promote, support and maintain readiness. Neither is there a centralized catalog of resources to which supervisors could refer when Airmen express a need for assistance with concerns of spiritual wellness and readiness.

Project Description: The 34th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron

In order to establish a viable scope of research within time constraints of the program, a single unit would be ideal to investigate the need in the area of spiritual readiness. This also allows a vantage point to assess the current state of spiritual wellness, experience and expression in the military member. The focus of this project has been the 34th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron in which the author is a currently participating enlisted member. In this way the project is elementally a case study and it establishes a beginning point to examine the issue, contemplate and create potential methods to support beneficial change and implement the methods on a small scale. This imbedded and intimate approach is beneficial in that it provides a means to overcome an integral issue of this work: A significant limitation to serving the spiritual needs of the current military member is perceiving and understanding, not presuming, his or her spiritual state.

The structure of the 34th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, or AES, is a product of the uniform design of Air Force units and reflects strong similarity to the leadership structure of other units both in issues identified and potential methods to overcome them. For these reasons, findings from this project are likely not unique to the 34th AES and the resulting tool can be implemented in other units to enhance the spiritual wellness and readiness of those enlisted persons as well, particularly other members of reserve component units.

Air Force Reservists encounter a set of conditions which differ from the traditional Active Duty Servicemember. They often refer to their lifestyle as “the three-legged stool.” This is the experience of simultaneously meeting the demands of a military career and a civilian career as well as a social-life balance which includes family and often the pursuit of

advanced education. In order to maintain balance and stability, physical, mental and spiritual energy must be dedicated to all these areas. In the Aeromedical Evacuation career field, the training and performance standards are identical to those of their active duty counterparts with the exception of a 30-day extension for frequency of actively performing in-flight duties. Although the requirements of Reservists match their Active Duty colleagues, the time available to meet them does not. The Reservist typically has three days per month to accomplish the tasks for which the Active Duty Servicemember is allocated twenty days. The time that a Reservist performs military duties generally occurs on weekend days and therefore substantially competes with time for activities that promote spiritual wellness such as attending religious meetings and services, recreational activities and leisure time with friends and family. Loss of these restorative practices can contribute to the spiritual distress of the individual.

An Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron is charged with providing medical care and safe tactical and strategic transportation of ill and injured persons both during combat operations and humanitarian responses onboard fixed-wing aircraft. The 34th AES is comprised of 60 total personnel, five of whom occupy full-time positions while the others are “Traditional Reservists”. Because the specialized mission of this squadron combines the requirements of military medical professionals as well as military aircrew members, the time that these personnel work together is greater than that of the typical Air Force Reserve squadron. In general, these units convene for only two days each month where Reserve Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron members are likely to work together four or more days per month. Also because the majority of the Aeromedical Evacuation capacity of the entire U.S. Military and other NATO forces is carried out by the U.S. Air Force Reserve Command,

there is a higher likelihood that these individuals have been called to active duty and deployed to support combat operations than the average Air Force Reservist.

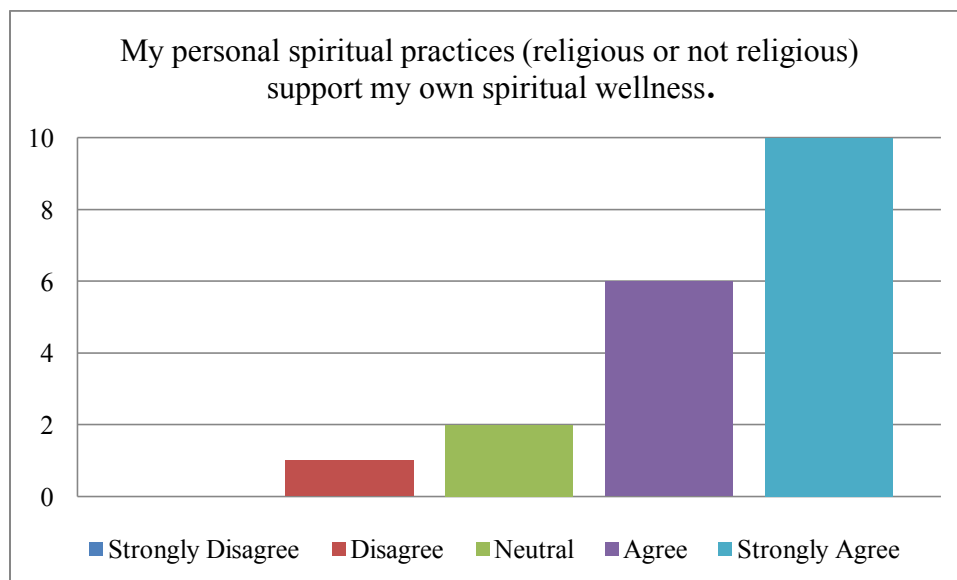
Although there is no “average member” of the 34th AES, it may be helpful in understanding their needs and experiences to examine the ranges of demographics and characteristics embodied by the unit. Females comprise 55 percent of the unit. Enlisted personnel outnumber commissioned officers 38 to 22. The longest tenure of military service is 26 years and there are gains of new members with no prior military service several times each year. Some individuals are full-time students or home-makers, but otherwise employment outside of the military medical or medical support roles is varied and ranges from advanced practice nursing to hairstylist and bartender. Most of the Flight Nurses and Aeromedical Evacuation Technicians have a history of multiple deployments in Southwest Asia during the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while the majority of the Medical Service Corps Officers, Medical Logisticians and Health Services Managers do not. The 34th AES has also recently experienced the loss of one member to suicide. That individual was a well integrated member of the unit with mid-level supervisor responsibilities.

Gap Analysis

In order to appreciate the current climate of the members of the unit, two different written surveys were distributed to members of the 34th Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron for voluntary participation. One survey focused on enumerating the spiritual and religious identities and experiences of the members of the unit and the second sought to determine the ways in which spiritual readiness was assessed and assured among enlisted members by their

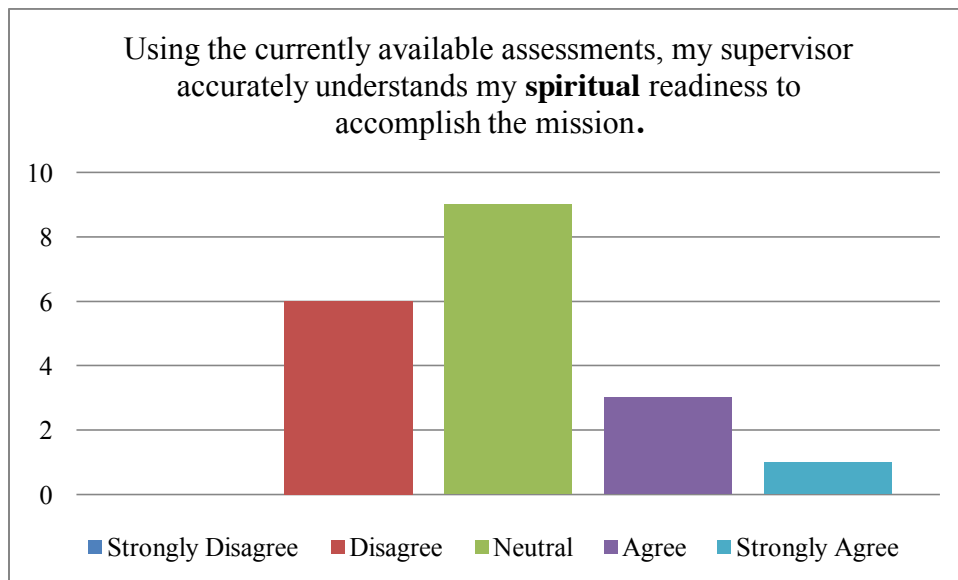
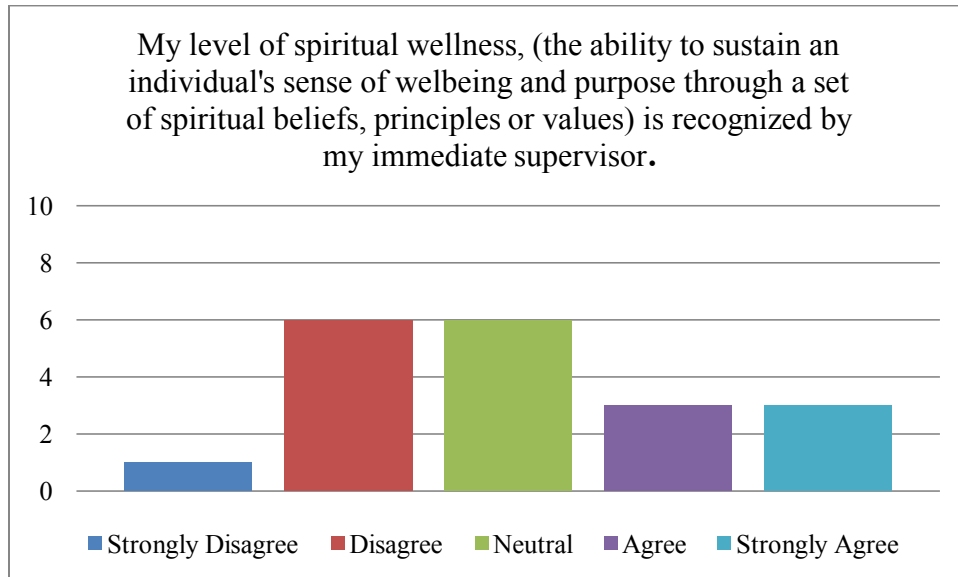
supervisors. A good response was received with greater than one-third participation in both surveys. Nineteen of the forty-five surveys distributed to squadron members regarding religious experience were completed and returned. Seventeen of the forty-five surveys distributed to supervisors were completed and returned. (Note: the author did not participate in the surveys.)

The most significant finding from the initial survey regarding spiritual experience was that although only 32 percent identified themselves as “religious”, every respondent indicated that he or she was “spiritual”. Airmen also stated that their own spiritual practices supported their wellness. This validates the need for spiritual support for all servicemembers and not only those who are actively involved with faith groups or have clearly defined religious practices.



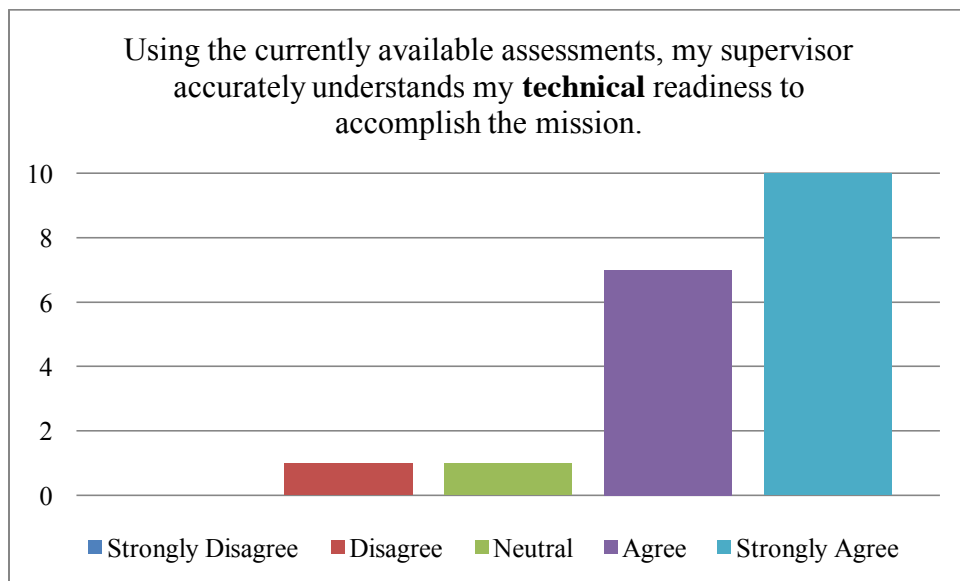
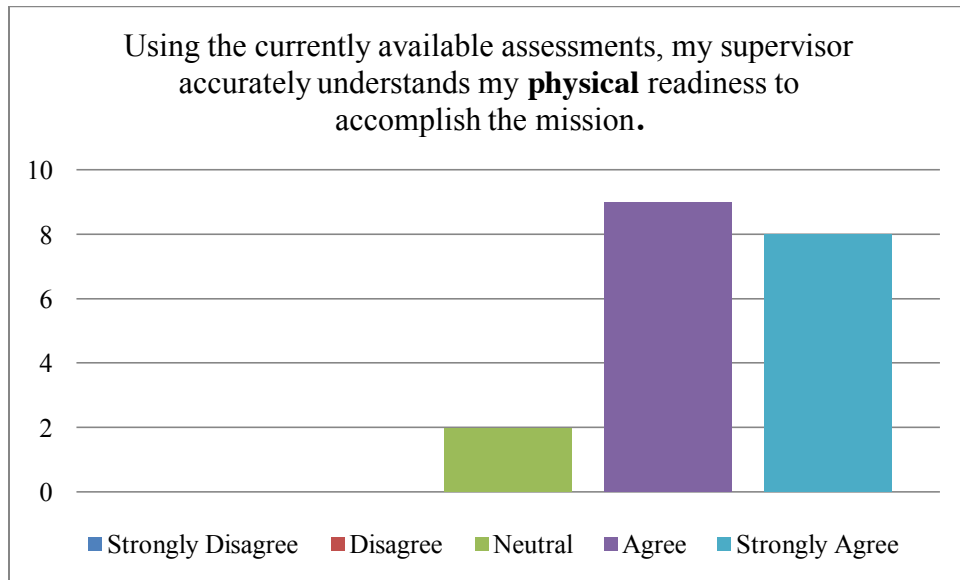
Four major faith groups were represented in the survey results with the preponderance being Christian (combined Catholic and Protestant). Deism, Buddhism and Hinduism were identified as the affiliation of one respondent each.

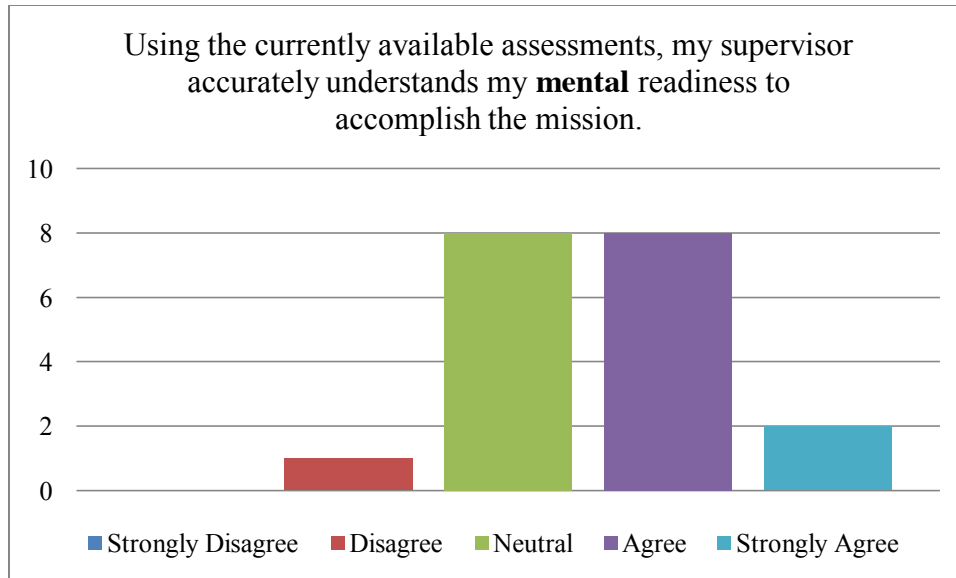
Airmen predominantly indicated that supervisors could appreciate their levels of technical, physical and mental readiness but were much less confident of their supervisors’ ability to recognize their level of spiritual readiness to accomplish the mission.



The survey included space for optional comment on the ways that supervisors do or do not recognize spiritual readiness. One Airman commented, “I don't feel that the military is geared towards spirituality. It is given a cursory nod, but not an in depth assessment. I

don't think my supervisor has any idea of my spirituality because it is not something we discuss.” Another offered, “This squadron does a great job supporting Christian spirituality, not so much for other beliefs. As with most Americans they do a poor job separating morality/religion and spirituality/religion. They are uncomfortable around other faiths and seem to turn a blind eye. -Note this unit is actually better than most. This is a societal problem.”





Survey responses regarding assessment revealed that supervisors have access to and understand methods for assessment of technical performance, physical and mental wellness and are largely confident in their abilities to assess and assure readiness in these areas in those they supervise. Supervisors, however, largely expressed lack of confidence in their abilities to understand the level of spiritual readiness of their supervisees and uncertainty about how to approach conversations about spiritual wellness. Some comments revealed that supervisors understand the need for such discussion, but are reluctant to engage due to concerns of professional boundaries. One respondent described his or her method of ensuring spiritual readiness as “Indirectly attempt to gain understanding of their support systems, level of resilience and how they handled challenges in the past. Also attempt to identify how many and degree of stressors currently involved in and what tools they have/utilize. Overall, I feel USAF does not allow open discussion on this topic.”

These results led to the creation of a resource that supervisors could use with their Airmen to foster discussion around their spiritual readiness and connection to resources which support their spiritual readiness.

Spiritual Wellness Feedback Program

The Spiritual Wellness Feedback Program is designed to be a facilitated conversation between an individual Airman and his or her direct supervisor. The intent is that it is driven by the needs and desires of the Airman. The method and training is modeled on the “5 C’s” foundation of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program. This makes it congruent with other Air Force Programs and provides a familiar structure and language. The design is to diminish intimidation of the subject matter for both parties and the risk of intentional, unintentional, actual or perceived violations of the rights to religious freedom guaranteed to Airmen under the constitution.

Training for supervisors includes a brief overview of constitutional rights of religious freedom of individuals and the limits of government in religious endorsement. Supervisors also receive education on the purpose of spiritual wellness feedback. Supervisor training is centered on the use of a feedback form to create an opportunity for Airmen to discuss their spiritual wellness in terms of what they use to support their own wellness and the ways in which the supervisor can in turn support those practices. Supervisors also need to be well aware of the established military, civilian and local community resources to which Airmen can be referred for additional support as needed.

The “5 C’s” foundation of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness- Care, Commit, Connect, Communicate and Celebrate - integrates well with the concept of spiritual wellness for Airmen. This model is expanded as an education and implementation format for supervisors and those they supervise.

Caring takes the form of recognizing that spirituality is an important component of readiness and the overall wellness in the life of every Airman regardless of religious expression or the absence of religious expression. Caring acknowledges that individual spiritual practices require nourishment and support and that they deserve to be respected by those who have similar practices as well as those with different practices.

Commitment comes with the desire of supervisors and Airmen to collaborate in a process in order to support spiritual wellness. Commitment to spiritual wellness is intertwined with the duty to be a “Wingman” or a mentor to and advocate for every single member of the Air Force, whether or not they share a common religious faith or set of spiritual practices. This level of commitment is imperative to successful execution of leadership and mentorship duties of the Enlisted Supervisor.

Connection happens when the supervisor reaches out to those they supervise in ways that acknowledge their level of spiritual wellness and needs for support. It also happens when supervisors offer support in the form of resources such as the Chaplain’s Office, the Wingman Toolkit and local organizations which support the individual spiritual practices and interests of the Airman. Connection also is demonstrated by respectful conversations about spiritual readiness and appreciation of spiritual practices in the lives of the Airmen they supervise.

Communication is at the core of the feedback process as supervisors ask about the Airman's practices utilizing the Feedback Form and listen to his or her responses. This is a reflective process to support the individual. Open communication and non-judgment is characterized by these facilitated discussions in which it is not appropriate to direct the Airman to a particular practice or to suggest that he or she is engaged in spiritual practices that are not acceptable. This communication is an opportunity to learn about the spiritual readiness of the Airman, not to promote one's own faith practices or to persuade him or her to affiliate with any faith group.

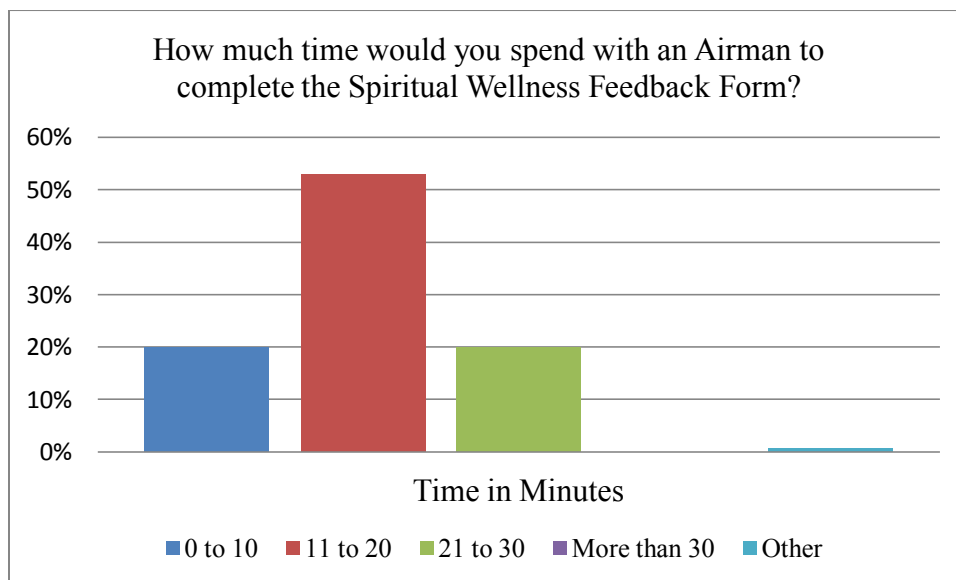
Celebration is embodied in the reflection to the Airman that he or she is a valued individual and worthy of and capable of happiness and fullness of life and that his or her spiritual wellness is supported in whatever forms it comes. Celebration also means that the Airman is congratulated on his or her effort and determination to maintain a healthy balance in life and to support his or her own spirituality in ways that contribute to the unit's wellness, the mission and a fuller experience of meaningful life. Supportive practices are encouraged and additional support is offered for when challenges to spiritual wellness and readiness arise.

Implementation Plan

The amount of time and energy needed to carry out a feedback conversation may depend on the level of direct contact that the supervisor has with the Airman or the amount of time they have worked together. As in other areas of assessment of readiness, some Airmen

may require more support than others. Likewise, an Airman who excels in one area or is essentially self-supporting in some aspect may need much more support in others.

Surveys indicate that most supervisors in the 34th AES expected to spend between eleven and twenty-nine minutes meeting with an Airman to discuss spiritual readiness while using the feedback form. Supervisors expressed that the conversations facilitated by the feedback form would be useful particularly in pre-deployment readiness planning. They indicated that their overall understanding of and connection with those they supervise was enhanced by these conversations. Supervisors also expressed a concern that conversations about spiritual wellness should be held completely separate from the performance evaluation process in order to avoid the appearance that assessment of spirituality and duty performance evaluation results were correlated. Most supervisors suggested that the conversation should be visited annually in order to maintain a good sense of the level spiritual readiness for Airmen.



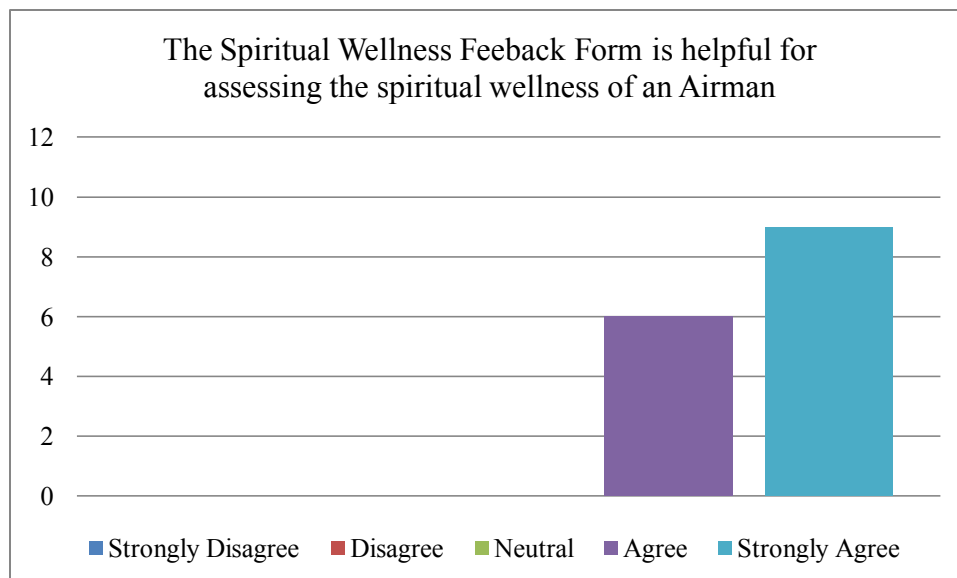
The feedback form should not be saved or copied and the original form with all its annotations should become the property of the Airman who may use it as he or she chooses. The supervisor should only maintain a record of the date on which the conversation occurred and if any further action was offered in response to or requested by the Airman. If the supervisor is concerned that the Airman is not spiritually ready to accomplish the mission as directed, the Airman himself or herself should be involved in notifying the commander and making a plan of support to become mission ready. No part of this process should be done without the knowledge of the Airman and noting regarding spirituality should be managed in a punitive manner. Specific concerns raised by the Airman to his or her supervisor are confidential and that trust should not be compromised except in the cases of reporting crime, intent to harm one's self or another, etc. In these cases, the supervisor must use his or her good judgment in consultation with resources such as the unit Commander, Judge Advocate staff, Chaplain, and mental health services, in order to protect the welfare of the Airmen as well as maintain as much privacy as practical.

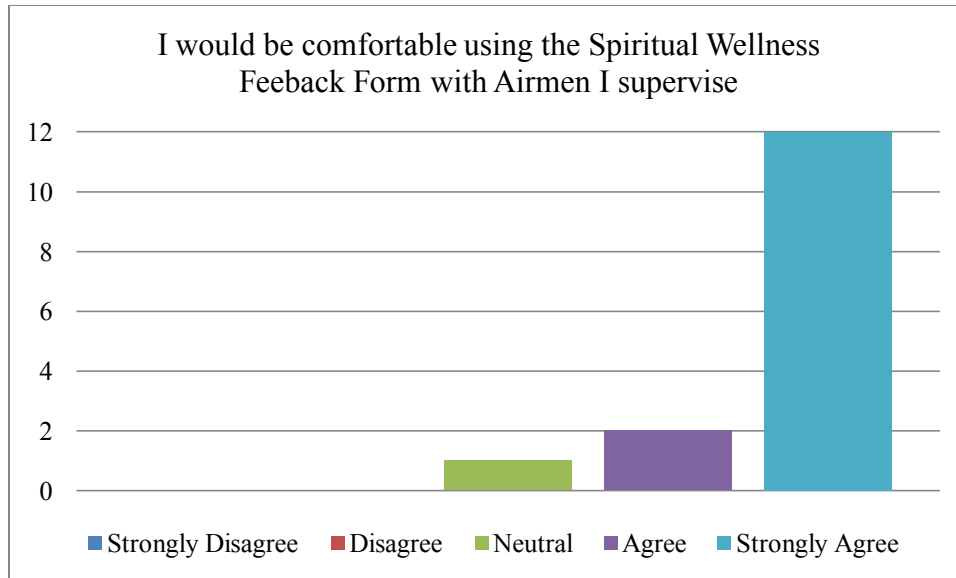
Several feedback sessions facilitated with the feedback form were conducted between Enlisted Airmen and their direct supervisors in the 34th AES during the Unit Training Assembly in November 2013. Verbatim accounts of these meetings were not recorded in order to preserve the integrity of the process and support genuine exchanges. Two of these sessions were of note as these particular dyads represented some of the potential problems which could be encountered and the ability of the facilitated discussion process to remain objective and overcome these issues.

One facilitated spiritual wellness conversation was between a supervisor who was raised with Thai Buddhist practices in his family and childhood home but who does not

currently practice a religious faith and a traditional, conservative Christian whom he supervises and significantly outranks. The other conversation of note was between two Airmen of the same rank; the supervisor describes his belief system as Deist and the other Airmen whom he supervises is a Muslim who does not strictly adhere to Islamic practices. (Note: These characterizations of the individuals' beliefs and practices come from direct conversations and self-description.) In both of these conversations the supervisor was extremely respectful and supportive of the Airman's spiritual practices and refrained from any comment about his own faith or spiritual practices. Also the supervisors expressed that they felt they better understood the Airman and were more equipped to support their readiness. The Airmen and their supervisors described the conversations as being comfortable and worthwhile. This demonstrates that a like spiritual or faith background is not required and that no proselytizing is promoted by the process.

Overall, the fifteen supervisors surveyed expressed that they would be comfortable using the feedback form and that using the form to facilitate a conversation is helpful in understanding the wellness of those Airmen they supervise.





Although this scale of trial has served as a beginning point and has been embraced at the unit level, it is acknowledged that the 34th AES represents a very small sample of the Air Force, more study and more trial is advisable. Wider implementation of a similar program throughout the Air Force and other branches of the military could occur after receiving a greater volume of participation and feedback from the level of individuals and squadron commanders. This would also require consultation with organizations within the Air Force such as Chaplain Services, Judge Advocates and Military Equal Opportunity with adaptations and improvements made with their recommendation. Training requirements for supervisors should be informed by these recommendations and the resulting training curriculum should in turn be developed and advanced by the feedback received and the outcomes noted.

Supervisors will need training in sensitivity to spiritual cultures, recognition of spiritual distress, separation of Church and State and expectations for Airman Readiness. They should be vetted by a process of both evaluating their understanding of the training objectives and by the unit level commander and Chaplain staff assessing objectivity and

ability to use the feedback tool. Ideally no supervisor would facilitate a feedback session without having first having the occasion to have the same experience with his or her own supervisor.

Conclusion

The women and men of the U.S. Air Force are spiritual beings and their spirituality is a component of their comprehensive wellness that must be considered when assessing readiness to perform duties. In the current culture of the Air Force, those individuals who express religious beliefs and identities or have visible faith practices which are understood as spiritual by their supervisors are assumed to be well and ready while those whose spiritual practices are less easily observed or are expressed in ways that not recognized as spiritual by their supervisors are not assessed at all. Using military Chaplaincy Services solely as the agent for assessing spiritual readiness may be safe in that it protects against violations of Separation of Church and State, but it largely excludes the needs of military members who do not engage with Chaplains. Also, judgment of spiritual wellness made without engaging in conversation with the individual may be deceiving. For instance, Airmen may appear spiritually ready because they are highly involved in a religious organization. However, they may so deeply rely on a local religious community that they find themselves struggling to maintain spiritual wellness when they are deployed and do not have access to this community or their usual practices. In other cases, Airmen may draw immense spiritual support and strength from time spent with family or from walking in silence. Because these more subtle

non-religious practices may not be familiar as “spiritual”, the supervisor may believe that the Airman is without spiritual wellness and therefore not ready to complete his or her duties.

A simple conversation between supervisor and Airman can overcome this gap in assessment and allow supervisors to gain a true understanding of spiritual wellness and readiness. These conversations will support those spiritual practices which allow Airmen to perform their often stressful duties. Supervisors must be empowered to have these conversations regarding spiritual readiness just as they have been empowered to consult those they supervise regarding their technical, physical and mental readiness. In order to make these conversations beneficial, to maintain their integrity and to protect the Civil Rights of Airmen, training regarding sensitivity to religious differences and Separation of Church and State is imperative in implementing such a process. The conversation itself must be guided by clear standards such as the proposed feedback tool based on the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program.

Each individual Airman serving deserves to have the advantage in his or her favor against PTSD, depression, suicide, anxiety, substance abuse and violence. This is one key goal of assessing readiness. Implementation of this process places an emphasis on spiritual wellness which is equal to the emphasis of the other aspects of readiness. It calls upon the Air Force to stand behind its mandate that wellness and readiness be supported, maintained and continually assessed. It is a method by which supervisors can make certain that their Airmen do not fall through the cracks in a system which currently has no means to assure that its own directives regarding spiritual readiness are met. By assessing readiness and supporting all dimensions of wellness at every level and in particular the most direct levels,

Airmen have a better opportunity to be successful in their missions and return from combat with healthy minds, bodies and spirits.

Epilogue

I have experienced this project on many levels and from many perspectives. As a military member there is a profound sense of tension in my own experience of being unendingly curious about my spiritual state and feeling called to service in a system which often has values and ethics which seem in conflict with spirituality. This project has empowered me to celebrate my own spirituality even within the military context and feel more integrated.

As a member of the 34th AES and supervisor of Enlisted Airmen, I have experienced the ways in which recognizing spirituality in others helps develop connection and increase the sense of compassion for other unit members. In the midst of surveys and interviews, authentic dialogue emerged. Long withheld conversations about grief and guilt surrounding the suicide of a friend and colleague, about the uncertainty of deployment, and about the insecurity of unstable marriages all come to the surface and they were met with deep listening and compassion.

As a student of Buddhist Chaplaincy I have viewed this experience as development of my education and through the lens of discerning vocation. While there may likely still be a role for me to serve under the formal title of Chaplain after the completion of training, the position for which I currently feel most well suited and perhaps most needed is to simply mindfully attend to that which is already in front of me. In the current Air Force model, the

Chaplain is not directly associated or embedded in the unit that he or she serves. But as an Enlisted person who works shoulder to shoulder with others, I have the gift of close relationship as I serve and am in turn humbly served by their kindness and compassion. I am in the fortunate position to “accompany” in the way of the chaplain while aspiring to the Bodhisattva vows as a medic who enters the hell realms of war and takes the wounded out to places of physical safety and improved health. My hope is that while caring for their bodies I can also care for their minds and spirits to promote healing and recognize wholeness.

Chaplaincy can be found in the military chapel with those whose badges represent their spiritual presence as well as in a combat aircraft among the medics who minister at a spiritual level with patients and crewmembers in much more subtle ways. Both have value, both can be magnetizing or repelling to those in need. I am currently exploring forms of chaplaincy which can stand in a space that honors both traditions and overcomes the limitations of both informal and formal chaplain roles in order to serve all suffering beings and especially those who suffer in the tension of a military system knowing they are spiritual, but not in a context of religion.

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U.S. Const. amend. I

U.S. Const. art. VI § 3

Appendix A

Results Compiled from Survey of Airmen

45 surveys were distributed to Commanders, First Sergeants, Flight Nurses, Aeromedical Evacuation Technicians, Medical Logisticians, Health Services Managers and Medical Service Corp Officers in the U.S. Air Force Reserve on 03 July 2013 with a five day allowance for completion and return.

The following instructions were listed at the beginning of the survey: "This survey contributes to MSgt Yahne's thesis project. Participation is voluntary and highly appreciated. The responses compiled from this survey are anonymous. Please complete and return this form to MSgt Yahne's V-File by COB July UTA."

Text from the distributed survey is indicated by italics below. In this compilation of responses, the original language and punctuation has been preserved verbatim when possible. Where symbols such as common medical shorthand were used, the standard meaning was transcribed.

Surveys distributed	45			
Surveys completed and returned	19			
% of distributed surveys completed and returned	42			
<u>Section I</u>	Yes	No	% Yes	% No
<i>Do you consider yourself "spiritual"?</i> <i>(Please circle your response) Yes No</i>	19	0	100	0
<i>Do you consider yourself "religious"?</i> <i>(Please circle your response) Yes No</i>	6	13	31.6	68.4

Section II

With which of the following general affiliations do you identify? (Please circle your response) Agnostism, Atheism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Orthodox Christianity, Protestant Christianity, Unitarian Universalism, Wicca, Other not listed

Agnostism	0
Atheism	0
Buddhism	1
Catholicism	8
Hinduism	1
Islam	0
Judaism	0
Orthodox Christian	0
Protestant Christian	6
Unitarian Universalism	0
Wicca	0
Other not listed (Please list)	4

Eighteen respondents marked this section. One respondent selected three affiliations (Buddhism, Catholicism and Hinduism). Four selected "Other not listed" those respondents added the following comments: "not sure", "Deism", "none", "blended/naturalist/spiritual type"

Section III

If you have a specific religious affiliation, please list it here: (i.e. Southern Baptist, Hasidism, Zen, etc.)

Three respondents marked this section. One wrote "Roman Catholic" and two wrote "Non-Denominational Christian"

Section IV

Please circle the number which corresponds to your agreement with each of the statements.

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
<i>My personal spiritual practices (religious or not religious) support my own spiritual wellness</i>	0	1	2	6	10	4.32
<i>My level of spiritual wellness, (the ability to sustain an individual's sense of wellbeing and purpose through a set of spiritual beliefs, principles or values) is recognized by my immediate supervisor</i>	1	6	6	3	3	3.05
<i>My level of spiritual wellness, (the ability to sustain and individual's sense of wellbeing and purpose through a set of spiritual beliefs, principles or values) is recognized by the chain of command in my unit</i>	2	6	7	3	1	2.26
<i>My personal spiritual practices (religious or not religious) are supported in the military</i>	0	3	6	6	4	3.58
<i>Using the currently available assessments, my supervisor accurately understands my spiritual readiness to accomplish the mission</i>	0	6	9	3	1	2.95
<i>Using the currently available assessments, my supervisor accurately understands my physical readiness to accomplish the mission</i>	0	0	2	9	8	4.32
<i>Using the currently available assessments, my supervisor accurately understands my technical readiness to</i>	0	1	1	7	10	4.37

accomplish the mission

Using the currently available assessments, my supervisor accurately understands my mental readiness to accomplish the mission

0 1 8 8 2 3.58

Please make any comments that may be helpful in understanding the ways that supervisors recognize or do not recognize your spiritual readiness

This squadron does a great job supporting Christian spirituality, not so much for other beliefs. As with most Americans they do a poor job separating morality/religion and spirituality/religion. They are uncomfortable around other faiths and seem to turn a blind eye. -Note this unit is actually better than most. This is a societal problem.

I'm not sure if my supervisor recognizes my level of spiritual wellness, personal spiritual practices, level of spiritual wellness. I don't discuss religion all too often enough. Physical is measured by the PT test so they know my physical readiness.

I don't feel that the military is geared towards spirituality. It is given a cursory nod, but not an in depth assessment. I don't think my supervisor has any idea of my spirituality because it is not something we discuss.

We do not get into those types of conversations. I choose to discuss spiritual/religious issues with persons I have a close trusting relationship with. The AF has policies and AFI's that support members' rel/spir. practices appropriately. Sometimes the mission and trng/UTA's do not allow for full realization of those plans. I feel I made the personal choice to join/serve and do not feel thwarted/discriminated against by my choices.

Spiritual readiness is not something I would usually bring up in a work situation. First off I may not agree with the "general public's" view and I don't want to offend anyone. Second this type of discussion is only usually shared between people that I am very close to and have known me for a long time.

Spirituality is not discussed

In my years in the military, I have found an apparent (subjective) level of religious people higher than in the civilian world. However, the last decade or so, the culture & military leadership influence seems to be leaning against the expression/practice of religion (again subjective opinion.)

Spiritual readiness is often not discussed until times of crisis, if at all. It just so happens that my immediate supervisors have shared my same faith (strangely all 3 supervisors I've had in this unit) and I even spoke w/ her this weekend. For those who are quiet about their beliefs or don't have any beliefs, the topic may never arise. I think people are a little apprehensive about bringing that up for fear of crossing lines or being offensive.

Spirituality is personal to me. I do not expect or often share my views. Not here (AES) but in other work places the sharing of my spiritual/religious (not Christian) views has created tension with my very Christian supervisor. While he tries hard not to let it interfere, it seeps through. This discord inhibits respect and recognition of the needs for spiritual readiness.

I do not involve my spiritual/religious beliefs at work so my supervisor, chain of command, etc. would be incapable of determining my readiness or capability. They don't avoid the issue, I do. This could make it difficult to approach them regarding said issue if I felt the need to. I feel there is an unspoken boundary between the military and the freedom to express spiritual beliefs.

These questions were hard to answer as my supervisor has changed a lot since I have been in the unit.

Appendix B

Results Compiled from Survey of Supervisors

45 copies of this survey were distributed to individuals who directly supervise enlisted personnel who are Aeromedical Evacuation Technicians, Medical Logisticians and Health Services Managers in the U.S. Air Force Reserve on 03 July 2013 with a five day allowance for completion and return.

The following instructions were listed at the beginning of the survey: “This survey contributes to MSgt Yahne's thesis project. Participation is voluntary and highly appreciated. The responses compiled from this survey are anonymous. Please complete and return this form to MSgt Yahne's V-File by COB July UTA.”

Seventeen surveys were completed and returned for a rate of return of 37.8%.

Text from the distributed survey is indicated by italics below. In this compilation of responses, the original language and punctuation has been preserved verbatim when possible. Where symbols such as common medical shorthand were used, the standard meaning was transcribed. The number listed with the response correlates to an individual respondent. For example, response number 7 following question 1 was given by the same person as response number 7 for questions 2, 3 and 4.

Question 1.

Airmen must “be technically ready to accomplish the mission. Attain and maintain a skill level commensurate with their rank and maintain a high degree of proficiency in their duties as outlined in their CFETP.” (AFI 36-2618 paragraph 3.1.4.1.)

In what ways do you assess Airmen whom you supervise to ensure they are technically ready to accomplish the mission?

1. technically is usually measured by how well they perform their job e.g. configuring aircraft, passing exams in flight school, tech school, etc.
2. through feedback sessions, personal observation, feedback from peers and leadership
3. make sure they are studying for and passing CDC's, diligent attention to class work at tech school and flight school
4. through EMT refresher courses, RSV's, training flights and QTPs
5. Ensure knowledge related to their job by observing performance and asking questions. Make sure they have good clinical skill and operational skill as well as all “military stuff” like CBTs and semi-annual requirements

6. observation of performance during training, completion of Airman's mandatory training courses, validation of skills during deployment
7. certifications, RSV's, CFETP currency, practical experience working with and assessing abilities
8. CFETP and completing training events
9. through upgrade training and self study
10. request Airman "show" me or walk me through a process and/or situation
11. "I" normally don't but "we" do this by completing training and skills verification. Additionally, AETs are evaluated Q18 mo's on aircraft items.
12. Review ITS prior to mission and check they don't have lapses in requirements
13. I supervise across career fields. Through maintained communication with my troop and communication with senior leaders in their career field I ensure technical readiness.
14. 20% QA checks, informal visual/verbal skills assessment
15. competence, organized, can restate manuals, prepared
16. watching them do their job, working with them on tasks
17. training evaluations, check rides, etc

Question 2.

Airmen must "be physically ready to accomplish the mission. Attain and maintain excellent physical conditioning and always meet Air Force fitness standards." (AFI 36-2618 paragraph 3.1.4.2.)

In what ways do you assess Airmen whom you supervise to ensure they are physically ready to accomplish the mission?

1. A good indicator is their PT score
2. through education, leading by example and support when struggling or excelling at the standards
3. maintaining passing fitness test, provide time for hands-on training, ensure participation in training flights

4. Through observation on local training flights - I watch the loading and unloading of litters and equipment onto the truck and aircraft. I observe AECM's loading simulated patients and know who can perform the duties and who can't.
5. Assess whether he/she can lift equipment/patients with ease or if they need an extra amount of help. Has nothing to do with the PT test. (A 90-lb Ethiopian could pass the PT test, but what good does that do us when loading patients and equipment?)
6. work out regularly, some are not physically ready
7. PT test
8. PT tests
9. ask them
10. Fit to Fight, engage in conversation - indirectly identify their physical activities while off duty
11. I review PFT scores and offer feedback to those that require encouragement
12. current fitness score, asking personally if they are feeling fit/well to do the mission at hand
13. He is the fitness monitor - he better be physically ready. I don't assess. I expect him to come to me if he is physically unprepared
14. AF PT scores, general health (what they eat, do they utilize gym time)
15. PT test passing
16. PT test, how they look in uniform, what I see them do or not do physically
17. PT test

Question 3.

Airmen must "be mentally ready to accomplish the mission. Issues that can affect and detract from mental readiness are quality of life, financial problems, sexual harassment, discrimination, stress, marital problems, and substance abuse. These types of issues can prevent individuals from focusing on the mission, diminish motivation, erode a positive attitude, and reduce the quality of work. This negatively impacts mission accomplishment." (AFI 36-2618 paragraph 3.1.4.3.)

In what ways do you assess Airmen whom you supervise to ensure they are mentally ready to accomplish the mission?

1. mentally would be their overall attitude at work
2. again feedback sessions, morale events, education, assistance to further resources
3. keeping in touch throughout the month, listening to what is being said and how it is delivered
4. On the rare chance I get to talk to people - I pay attention to their body language and physical changes such as weight loss, fatigue, etc. Being situationally aware provides insight as to an individual's mental state.
5. Ensure they have an acceptable level of stress balancing home/work/school/etc. See where their head is concerning our military, our mission and their own ideas about right/wrong in the grand scheme of things (if we went down, could they keep faith in the U.S. and their fellow troops if captured)
6. take breaks/vacations from work, spend time with families, maintain a positive attitude despite setbacks
7. mostly subjective assessments/working with member
8. briefings and knowing/identifying resources available, Family Readiness Center
9. ask them and evaluate attitude
10. indirectly via 1:1 conversations, engage monthly to build rapport, provide personal contact information and encourage them to call during the month
11. On flights, we do with by ORM assessment. In the building, being "aware" of your troop's behavior and detecting changes can predicate interaction to ensure mental fortitude
12. ORM score and general "assessment" of how everyone looks - appearance, cleanliness, etc.
13. Assessing mental readiness requires knowing your troop, their everyday behaviors and attitude and acknowledging any (even subtle) changes with immediate discussion.
14. informally inquire about personal life (family, work environment, etc.)
15. have tools to de-stress, exercise regularly, can talk about problems with others
16. Attitude - although I believe that people could possibly keep things to themselves that are negatively affecting them.
17. monthly conversations about non-work issues

Question 4.

Airmen must “be spiritually ready to accomplish the mission. Spiritual readiness is the development of those personal qualities needed to help a person through times of stress, hardship, and tragedy. Spiritual readiness may or may not include religious activities.” (AFI 36-2618 paragraph 3.1.4.4.)

In what ways do you assess Airmen whom you supervise to ensure they are spiritually ready to accomplish the mission?

1. If they seem depressed I would talk to them and see if they are in any spiritual distress. Sometimes people are good at hiding that they are in spiritual distress though...
2. By supporting religious and spiritual preferences, sharing experiences, and by not having prejudice
3. Keeping in touch, sharing my point of view or tips for coping
4. Spirituality is hard to assess on its own and I think it is probably most closely associated with mental readiness
5. Honestly, it doesn't come up much. I guess I don't ensure spiritual readiness, so I will keep this in mind in the future when talking to my troops
6. Balance between life/work, practice their religion/spirituality regularly, commune/share/laugh with others.
7. Mostly only if the member brings the subject up or presents and problems/issues in the course of the working environment.
8. I don't feel that there is a tool that is easily accessible and/or easy to use to address spiritual readiness.
9. I don't.
10. Indirectly attempt to gain understanding of their support systems, level of resilience and how they handled challenges in the past. Also attempt to identify how many and degree of stressors currently involved in and what tools they have/utilize. Overall, I feel USAF does not allow open discussion on this topic.
11. Great question. I do not. I do welcome peoples' discussion of spirituality and its importance in their lives.
12. I don't believe that I have done this. I would see this happening in the deployed setting with patients.

13. Again, I rely on my troop to ensure they are spiritually ready. Due to my spirituality/religion not fitting the mainstream mold I can only offer support to their beliefs and needs without judgment.
14. Ask about hobbies, interests, etc. to determine members' coping strategies.
15. If they have a faith to reach spirituality or have support from others to help get there.
16. I don't. I see this as a private matter. People usually bring up the subject if they want to discuss it but I would not bring up the subject with my Airmen to avoid making them feel awkward or feel like they have to talk about it because I am their supervisor.
17. Simply asking, "How are you? Is there anything I can do to help?" I freely admit this is a weak area of my supervision as I don't really know how to approach it without opening myself up to possible future MEO complaints.

Appendix C

Model for Spiritual Wellness Support of Enlisted Airman

Based on the Comprehensive Airman Fitness Program's Five C's

Care - Spirituality is an important component of readiness and the overall wellness of every Airman. Although an individual's religious or spiritual expression might be very different from your own, everyone has a spiritual aspect of life which requires nourishing and support and deserves to be respected.

Commit - The Comprehensive Airman Fitness program has four pillars: Physical, Mental, Social and Spiritual. It is a collaborative process which includes conversations among Supervisors and the Airmen they supervise to ensure spiritual wellness. In order to fulfill your duties and to be a good Wingman, you must ensure the Airmen you mentor and lead are fit and spiritually ready to accomplish the mission.

Connect - Reach out to Airman whom you supervise in ways that acknowledge their level of spiritual wellness and needs for support. Offer support with resources such as the Chaplain's Office, the Wingman Toolkit and local organizations which support the spiritual practices and interests of the Airman. Frequently assess the Airman's spiritual readiness in the same way that you would assess his or her physical, mental or technical readiness. Always demonstrate your professionalism and respect during conversations about spiritual readiness.

Communicate - Ask about the Airman's practices utilizing the Feedback Form and listen to his or her responses. This is a reflective process to support the individual. It is not appropriate to direct the Airman to a particular practice or to suggest that he or she is engaged in practices that are not acceptable. This is an opportunity to learn about the spiritual readiness of the Airman you supervise, not to share your own faith practices or to persuade him or her to affiliate with any faith group.

Celebrate - Reflect to the Airman that he or she is a valued individual and worthy of happiness and that you support his or her spiritual wellness in whatever forms it comes. Congratulate the Airman on his or her effort and determination to maintain a healthy balance in life and to support his or her own spirituality in ways that contribute to the unit's wellness and to the mission. Encourage the Airman to continue practices which are supportive of wellness and to engage with resources for additional support as needed when challenges arise.

Spiritual Wellness Feedback Form

Feedback for: _____ Supervisor: _____

Feedback Date: _____

According to AFI 36-2618, “Be spiritually ready to accomplish the mission. Spiritual readiness is the development of those personal qualities needed to help a person through times of stress, hardship, and tragedy. Spiritual readiness may or may not include religious activities.” There are many practices such as prayer, meditation, attending religious services, spending time in nature or with family that may support an Airman’s spiritual readiness. What are some specific practices that support your spiritual readiness?

Spiritual wellness is the ability to sustain a sense of wellbeing and purpose through a set of spiritual beliefs, principles or values. What currently provides you with support for spiritual wellness?

- My own activities (such as spiritual reading, spending time in nature, meditation, etc.)
List: _____
- Church, Temple, Mosque, Synagogue or Other Faith Community
- Military Chaplains
- Family
- Friends
- Civilian Co-Workers
- Members of the Military
- Other(s) (Please list) _____
- None. I do not have support for my spiritual wellness.

How satisfied with your current level of spiritual wellness are you? _____

Do you believe you are spiritually ready to accomplish the mission IAW AFI 36-2618? Yes / No

Would you like your supervisor to help you find additional resources to support your spiritual wellness? Yes / No

Supervisor recommendations:

- Continue current practices
- Meet with Chaplain for additional support
- Meet with personal spiritual leaders for additional support
- Meet with Airman Family Readiness Center for additional support
- Other _____
- Follow-Up with Supervisor by this date: _____

Appendix D

Results Compiled From Survey on Feedback Tool

15 copies of this survey were distributed to individuals who directly supervise enlisted personnel who are Aeromedical Evacuation Technicians and Health Services Managers in the U.S Air Force Reserve immediately following a feedback form trial with the Airmen whom they supervise between October 2013 and December 2013.

The following instructions were listed at the beginning of the survey: “This survey contributes to MSgt Caruso-Yahne’s thesis project. Participation is voluntary and highly appreciated. The responses compiled from this survey are anonymous.”

All 15 surveys were completed and returned for a rate of return of 100%.

Text from the distributed survey is indicated by italics below.

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Average</i>
<i>The Spiritual Wellness Feedback Form is helpful for assessing the spiritual wellness of an Airman</i>	0	0	0	6	9	4.60
<i>I would be comfortable using the Spiritual Wellness Feedback Form with Airmen I supervise</i>	0	0	1	2	12	4.73
	<i>0 to 10 Minutes</i>	<i>11 to 20 Minutes</i>	<i>21 to 30 Minutes</i>	<i>> 30 Minutes</i>	<i>Other Response</i>	
<i>How much time would you spend with an Airman to complete the Spiritual Wellness Feedback Form?</i>	3	8	3	0	1	
Percentage of Responses	20	53	20	0	0.7	

This other response received for the questions was written in the space below the time range options.

“Depends on what they need.”

Keywords: spirituality, modern religion, religious discourse, definition of religion, individualism. INTRODUCTION In popular commentary, it is not hard to find claims that there is a growing division between organized religion and spirituality (Ellingson 2001), but the evidence is often ambiguous at best. Chaves (2011) reports, based on General Social Survey data, that since 1998, the number of Americans who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious has increased from 9 percent to 14 percent, with the most marked increase among those under 40. What he The study found that many "spiritual but not religious" Americans maintain a connection to some sort of organized faith tradition, even if they do not practice it regularly. Just three in 10 religiously unaffiliated Americans ranked as spiritual but not religious, suggesting that most spiritual-but-not-religious Americans maintain links with a more formal religious identity; the largest groups of these identify as mainline Protestant (18 percent) or Catholic (18 percent). It was easier not to have the hard "gay and Christian"™ conversations, so religion grew even more into this very private and personal thing for me that not a lot of other people were involved in.