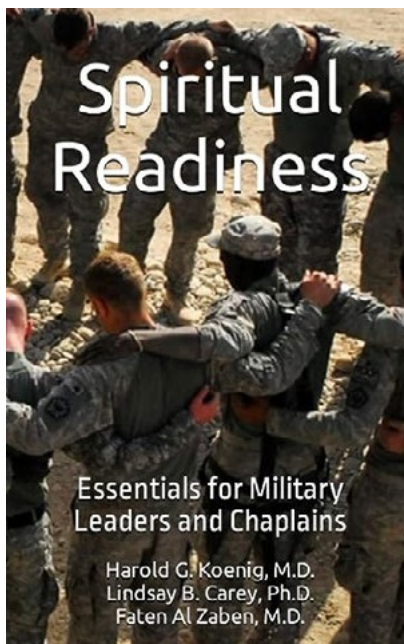


# Book Review of *Spiritual Readiness: Essentials for Military Leaders and Chaplains*

D. Cronshaw



*Spiritual Readiness: Essentials for Military Leaders and Chaplains*

by Harold G. Koenig, Lindsay B. Carey & Faten Al Zaben  
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Reviewed by Darren Cronshaw

Modern psychology and contemporary militaries now recognise what ancient religions and philosophies have long known—that there is an important spiritual aspect to life and death. This book considers research into spirituality, health and fitness and how that relates to the readiness of military members: their spiritual readiness.

Some of the problems of why members are not deployable or most effective relate to mental health, substance abuse, relationship struggles, PTSD and moral injury. For American and Australian readers, one strength of the book is that it utilises some key descriptive statistics of the US Armed Forces and the Australian Defence Force about these issues. It is

well illustrated with a variety of treatment programs used in these contexts. The US Department of Defense partly sponsored the book as a resource for chaplains and military leaders to help recognise the importance of and develop the capability enhancer of spiritual readiness. It examines spiritual readiness as part of human flourishing and how religion or spirituality affects the physical, social, behavioural and physical domains of spiritual readiness.

The three writers are experts in this field Dr Harold Koenig is Director of the Center for Spirituality, Theology and Health and Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University Medical Center. He was co-leader of the 2022 Professional Development Training Course (PDTC) for the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, designed to build and sustain spiritual readiness in preparation for combat operations. Dr Lindsay Carey is an Associate Professor (Adjunct) with the School of Psychology and Public Health and the Centre for Ethics and Society at the University of Notre Dame (Sydney). He is also a Wing Commander Senior Research Chaplain with ADF Joint Health Command and was co-awarded the Sir Edward Weary Dunlop Award (2019) for research into moral injury. Dr Faten Al Zaben is an Associate Professor and division chief of psychiatry at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia and has an extensive research background in medicine and public health, including mental health and moral injury.

The writers acknowledge that military members can derive inspiration for values, meaning and purpose from non-religious sources. However, these are spiritual in the broader sense. The call to sacrifice, working for the greater good, fostering good character, mindfulness and meditation practices, and having a sense of horizontal transcendence in fighting for your mates are aspects of spiritual readiness that many people of any religion or none can draw upon. Some philosophies can foster spiritual readiness, such as Stoicism and its focus on character building and what we can control by not complaining.

Moreover, the authors suggest to followers of a religion that there is a particular utility in identifying the resources of their faith. For example, Christian, Jewish and Muslim believers have practices that help them seek guidance in prayer, reduce anxiety from trusting God, and pray for strength and endurance. Eastern religions of Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism elevate righteous living, and good character, and often idealise non-violence and non-retaliation. Indic faiths of Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism each have their own distinct beliefs and practices. For example, there are a number of Sikh soldiers in my unit. I was curious to learn about their meditation and prayer bead practices, and how these help with a sense of wholeness and relief of anxiety, as well as guidance for a life of service.

As well as detailing the beliefs and practices of these different religions as they undergird spiritual readiness, the text evaluates religion-specific therapy manuals and interventions for anxiety, depression, moral injury and PTSD. For example, one of the programs assessed is Pastoral Narrative Disclosure (PND) as part of moral injury skills training (MIST) that ADF chaplains are utilising with an important reliance on ritual and restoration. These are resources chaplains particularly may draw on. Still, they are also essential for leaders, that is policymakers, commanders, therapists and medical providers.

So what is 'spiritual readiness'? The Navy Chaplains Corp defines it as 'the strength of spirit that enables the war-fighter to accomplish the mission with honor' (pp. 57–58). Other definitions and various measurements are offered, such as the Spiritual Fitness Inventory (SFI) and Spiritual Attitudes Inventory (SAI), as well as models for developing it, such as the Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) System.

There are, of course, concerns about promoting religion in a secular society. Yet the experience of fear, discouragement, despair, doubt, temptation and guilt are arguably universal. Spiritual resources tailored to an individual, including recognition of

their religion, can address these experiences and help reduce depression, suicide, substance abuse problems, and inappropriate anger and aggression. Moreover, spiritual readiness can help prepare military members for surviving and returning home healthy in mind and soul from combat, as the authors conclude:

*History has demonstrated that providing warriors with the most powerful munitions platforms, weapon systems, and technology is often not enough to win wars. They must also have the strength of spirit (and will power) to accomplish their duties with honor, which will help them not only succeed in these military endeavors but also avoid the devastating inner conflicts that might otherwise result. (p. 231)*

As the authors wisely suggest, it can also help ameliorate the revenge and hate in an adversary that can tragically re-ignite future conflicts.

*Spiritual Readiness* is an accessible but thoroughly researched manual on understanding and cultivating the all-too-often neglected spiritual health of soldiers for the sake of their fighting effective missions and guarding their souls.

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Australian Army, the Department of Defence or the Australian Government.*

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