

## LOST SOULS IN THE WARS OF THE WORLD

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### I: Soul and the Ecology of War

“Soul is a prime mover,” James Hillman writes.<sup>1</sup> Then what happens when the soul experiences powers far beyond its own overwhelming it and attempting to dislodge it from its existence? Soul’s “primary movement is deepening,” Hillman continues.<sup>2</sup> Then what happens when it experiences both the human world and the physical powers unleashed by war attempting to dislodge it by all the roots -- physical, psychological, cultural, ethical, spiritual -- that hold it in place and deepen it into the cosmos? “All things compose and decompose, generate and degenerate into soul.”<sup>3</sup> Then what happens when it is only the decomposition and degeneration processes to which soul is exposed and overexposed until that is all that seems to remain of the organic movement of life? Soul is that which distinguishes good from bad, and strives to do that which is for its betterment, Socrates said. Then what happens when its ecology becomes a complete hell -- bent on devastation, doing all the harm that can be done, the sole remaining good becoming the attempt to survive, and even that attempt necessitating the doing of harm to others?

Let us consider portraits from several modern wars that demonstrate some of the ways souls become lost during exposure to extreme violence and how souls remain lost long after the violence has ceased.

### II: Souls Lost in War

He tries to read but the sentences don’t hold together. He opens letters left lying on his desk for weeks, then tears them into shreds before completing them. He chain smokes. The light of the sun or a bulb burns his eyes. He doesn’t wash. He doesn’t fraternize. He doesn’t clean his room, but he never leaves it either. He can’t stop trembling. He feels “his mind dislodge itself and teeter, like insecure luggage on an overhead rack.” He squeezes his temples and holds on tightly. His friend, whose sister is majoring in psychology, delivers this word from home: “She says nobody gets a nervous breakdown from the war and all.”<sup>4</sup>

This is J.D. Salinger’s fictionalized portrait of a traumatized combat soldier in Europe shortly after the cessation of hostilities in World War II. It is emblematic of two factors: the psyche’s response to extreme violence and the civilian public’s denial of the true cost to the soul of such violence.

Lest it be argued that this portrait is fictional, take this example of a Bosnian concentration camp survivor currently in psychotherapy, striking in its similarities:

Ramiz, a recent immigrant to this country, a political refugee, is a Bosnian Muslim who was interred in Serbian concentration camps for almost a year. He chain smokes. He can’t sleep, or when he does, he has nightmares of camp experiences. He can’t concentrate enough to read or write. He avoids his wife and family and has no friends. He hides in his apartment, which he cannot clean, during the day. He hides from

the light. He spends hundreds of nighttime hours aimlessly walking the streets of the foreign city that hosts him, or sitting in front of a television set watching programs he cannot understand, but quickly flicking off any pictures of violence. He is tortured by headaches for which he can find no relief. He rarely changes his clothes and keeps his hair cropped to the scalp as it was in the camps. He does not talk about his camp experiences. His wife and relatives say, "Nothing that can happen is terrible enough to make a person like this. He must be crazy."

These are portraits of the severe damage and dislocation the soul suffers after exposure to extreme violence and life-threatening conditions. It is the condition we have come to call Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. The essence of PTSD is the extreme brutality done to the soul that has chased it from its connections to this world. In Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, the soul has fled body, world and cosmos. It will not return if this flight and its resultant lost condition are not recognized and directly addressed.<sup>5</sup>

Many traditional psychological workers either know little about conditions of soul, or deny that extremes of violence perpetrated on the adult personality can have such extensive and debilitating consequences. As James Hillman has argued, the dominance of developmental theories of psychology do not allow that the psyche can be so affected by events experienced during the adult years.

Jack, a reconnaissance patrol sergeant in Vietnam, was dissatisfied with the psychotherapy he received from his Veterans Administration hospital for this very reason.

They place too much emphasis on what happened in childhood... Not that my childhood doesn't affect me. But they always steer me away from the war, as if its effects were only repeats of my childhood rather than problems in themselves. [But] I say, 'Doc, if you had 70 near fatal car accidents in one year of your life between ages 18 and 19, do you think that would mess you up all by itself?'

I have heard such comments with painful regularity during my 20 years of work with combat veterans and other survivors of modern war. A great many war survivors feel themselves adrift like the debris of history in the midst of a mainstream population that "doesn't get it" because they have not personally experienced the overwhelming destruction and horror of modern war. Survivors feel shaken and fragmented to their cores as the inevitable result of overexposure to such horror. They simultaneously feel utterly alone in a business-as-usual world that denies their suffering by either not seeing it or blaming it on their inadequacies. The result: souls wounded and fragmented in their essence, dislodged from the universe, and homeless in the shared world.

### III: "My Soul Has Fled"

When bullets are flying or bombs falling, when human beings by the dozens, hundreds or thousands, with all their killing machines, are arrayed against you, when all that you perceive appears bent on your destruction, the soul responds with such terror that it simultaneously attempts to leave the world and do everything in its power to preserve its existence.

Sometimes the soul becomes lost slowly, in a process of erosion due to repeated exposure to violence. Sometimes it occurs suddenly, during one unexpectedly brutal event. Often, survivors can recover the event during which the soul finally fled its

connections to the world.<sup>7</sup> The recovery of this memory is a critical component of psychotherapy with survivors of war and extreme violence.

Here is an in-depth account of one Vietnam veteran who recalled vividly (and, uncharacteristically, during our first psychotherapy session), his experience of soul erosion and loss during combat.

Gary burst into my office wearing a black leather riding jacket, tight jeans and high black boots. He, too, cropped his hair like a concentration camp inmate. I put out my hand and introduced myself. He stared at it and grunted, "Uh huh!"

Gary stomped through my office, looking out each window in the waiting room, hallway and therapy room and behind each closed door. When we entered the therapy room, he moved a chair into a corner from which he could survey the entire room.

"That's better," Gary said in a froggy voice. He looked over his shoulder and out the window towards the trees. "Yeah. Okay. This is nice. Maybe I can relax a little here."

I stretched and said, "Well, I'm going to. I hope you can do the same."

He looked at me with big eyes. "You are? You ain't afraid. You're not gonna scribble notes or nothin'?"

"No," I said, looking gently at his wild eyes. "This meeting is just for us to get to know each other."

"Huh! That don't sound like any shrink I've ever met."

"Good!" I chuckled.

He looked at me strangely, then chuckled also.

"Okay, Doc. I gotta get serious. I'm in bad trouble. I need help." Gary was rated as 50% psychiatrically disabled by the Veterans Administration. He worked part time for the post office, where he experienced harassment, especially from his boss, who called him "the .38 killer." He was having a hard time concentrating or restraining his rage and was afraid of losing his job.

Gary said, "I have double vision." Though he saw what was before him at the present moment, he experienced war events as happening simultaneously. "I'll be standing at the post office window selling stamps to an old lady," he said, "and at the same time, I'll be seeing NVA [North Vietnamese Army regulars] charging up the hill at my machine gun post. It takes all the control I can muster to stay right there at my window and just count out change."

Gary trusted no one, was numb to all feelings but "staying on red alert." He had to stay distant from everyone or he'd let his guard down. He startled, could not sleep or, when he did, had nightmares of combat, and "I'm loaded to the gills with survivor's guilt."

"I shouldn't be here. I should be dead a thousand times. I'm tellin' you, the things I been through. That's why I'm just waitin' for it. Death is chasing me. It'll catch up to me. It's got to. Nobody could survive what I did and still be alive. Sometimes I'm convinced I'm not."

"I can tell you've been scared out of your wits," I said. "You're trembling down to your bones. You had to be through the most horrible things a person can endure. You had to be frightened down to your very soul."

"My soul?" Gary asked. His brow furrowed. "Docs don't talk about souls." His face turned white. He stared at me with pinpoint eyes. "My soul has fled."

"What do you mean?"

"It's gone. It fled my body. I felt it leave."

"Yes. Souls are alive. Souls can enter and souls can leave. Tell me how that happened."

He looked deeply into my eyes, then asked, "You believe me?"

"Yes," I nodded.

He leaned forward, looked deeper. "I believe you do. All right. I'll tell you. It happened at Khe Sanh."

"You were there?"

"The whole damn time! From the end of '67 till we pulled out in June of '68. You know how thick snowflakes fall in the middle of a blizzard?"

"Sure," I said.

"That's how we pounded the hell out of the enemy," Gary said. "Day and night. Night and day. Air strikes. Heavy bombers. Fighter jets. Heavy and light artillery. My God, I can still feel the earth shaking. In just nine weeks, we dropped 75,000 tons of bombs. I'm tellin' you, Doc. A cockroach couldn't live through what we dropped on them." Gary leaned forward again, staring through me. "But each day, they were charging up my hill again by the thousands. I was a machine gunner. I'd shoot and scream, 'You crazy bastards, don't make me kill you. Stop it! Go home!' They'd fall like flies, but they'd keep comin'. They must have lost 10,000 at Khe Sanh. But they wouldn't stop. It worked too! We were stupid! Khe Sanh was worthless. It was just a blasted pile of mud that nobody wanted. But Westmoreland wasn't gonna lose. Oh God, what we'll do to win! He brought everything we had to Khe Sanh while the gooks spread out in the south and infiltrated everywhere. He fell right into their trap!"

I looked into his eyes tenderly, holding them in place, in the room. "That's enough to scare the soul out of anybody," I said.

"Yeah. My soul," Gary said. "Let me tell you what it's like. You can feel the connection between your body and your soul when it starts to break. It's like a thread. You can feel it fraying. I tried so hard, during those long nights with the earth shuddering beneath me, with my hands over my ears, I concentrated so hard to keep that thread from snapping. But it was getting thinner and thinner.

"One day, I had my breakfast in the mess. I sat in the same blue plastic chair in the corner all the time. I felt safer there. Then I went to my post. I was at my machine gun. The same damn thing happened as happened every day. The gooks were comin' up the hill. They were thick that day. They wouldn't stop. They fell by the dozens, but they just climbed over the bodies and kept comin'. God, I could see their eyes.

"Then mortars started fallin' on us. They must have set 'em up to support this charge. This time they were gonna get in. We had to hold the perimeter. I was shootin' and screamin'. I called for more ammo belts. I looked around. I was the only one left. My buddies had split. I looked behind me and I could see them running like hell toward the base. 'C'mon Gary!' my sarge yelled. In front, the gooks were almost up the hill.

"God, I flew out of that foxhole like lightening. My feet were pounding the mud. I could feel the gooks behind me. I could hear their breathing. Bullets were whizzing by me. I was a goner for sure. That's when it happened."

I didn't take my eyes from his. "Your soul?" I asked.

"I felt it, Doc. The cord snapped. My soul ran right out of my body. It ran faster than me, yards ahead of me. I was exhausted. I wanted to lay down and let them kill me.

But it was like I was being pulled along in a jet stream. I couldn't stop. I guess my soul didn't want me to die yet. It saved me."

"That sounds like the only good part."

"No. Wait. I got through our second line. My squad, what was left of it, gathered where it was safe. But I couldn't stop. My soul kept pulling me. I kept running. I ran all the way to the mess. I ran in, like it was safe there, like my blue chair could protect me. Then I stopped dead. I looked. My soul stood next to me and looked. There was a huge hole in the roof over that section of the mess. My blue chair was blown to Kingdom Come. If I would have stayed any longer at breakfast, I'd be in the other world. That was it."

"What?"

"It. The End. I saw my soul shake its head. There was no way it was gonna move back inside my body."

We both breathed deeply and sat a while in silence. "Is it still out?" I asked.

"Yeah," Gary said. "I don't tell anybody this, but it's right here next to me. It's sittin' here looking at you deciding if it's gonna trust you. It's like my twin. It's like there's two of me wherever I go. I can see it and feel it. I got to listen to what it says, y'know. You can't go against your soul."

Gary stared out the window. "It's nice here. I can't believe I told you this. I don't tell nobody. So you tell me, Doc. Is there any way to get your soul back into your body?"

"There is such a thing as soul work," I said. "Native Americans and ancient people knew just what you are talking about. Terror can make the soul flee the body. It's too dangerous to stay in there, so the soul leaves. But then if you don't die, the soul gets stuck. It can't go to the spirit world, because its body is still alive. But it's too scared to climb back into its body."

"Exactly," Gary said. "I was afraid you'd say I'm crazy."

This is the extreme of dissociation. It is more than the psychic numbing, more than separation of mind from body. It is a removal of the center of experience from the living body without completely snapping the living cord between them. In the presence of extreme life-threatening violence, the soul, the true self flees. The center of experience shifts so that the body takes the impact of the trauma but does not feel or register it as deeply without soul presence. With body and soul separated, we are neither living nor dead, but trapped in a limbo in which past and present intermingle without differentiation or continuity.

Nothing can feel right unless body and soul rejoin. In ancient times and traditional societies, such soul work was the domain of shamans. Soul loss was a recognized condition and there were many forms of soul retrieval. Today, this work falls to therapists who, too often, are poorly equipped to do it.

"I believe you, Gary," I said. "It's not a crazy thing you're telling me. It's sane," I said. "Your soul splitting from your body at that moment was sane."

Gary allowed a tight-lipped smile.

"We can try to make your body a safe place for your soul to move back to," I said. "If we can get you off combat alert, if you can learn to trust just a little bit, if we can find ways of talking not just to you," I bowed in a gesture of welcome and respect to the air next to Gary, "but to your soul over there, maybe we can bring you two closer together."

Gary nodded, leaned back for the first time and let his head fall back. He took a deep breath, then sighed.

"I've never told anybody this much before," he said. "My soul always stops me at the first sign of disbelief. But now it's out." He looked out the window again. "Yeah," he sighed. "It's not bad here. Maybe I can learn to relax a little."

#### IV: Some Forms of Soul Loss as Response to Violence

A middle-aged woman was hunting with friends, a few of whom were novices at the sport. She returned to their van to warm herself. A friend stood by her window and saw a deer break loose through in the woods on the far side of the road. Without thinking or aiming, the friend raised his rifle and shot through the van windows. The bullet blasted past the woman's head and ricocheted around the inside of the van, just missing her several times before it wedged in the seat by her side.

This woman felt her soul flee her body in terror at that moment. She also reported a double life. Her soul, too, she said, was attached by a thin living cord. During therapy sessions, she pointed to it, floating in the air over her shoulder. She would turn to it and listen to what it said to her, then report her soul's comments to me. What appeared crazy to her family felt sane and inevitable to her.

Body-soul splitting is only one way that a soul exposed to severe threat manifests its lost condition. One man, a consultant, arranged his office like an interrogation room. He had a long, narrow room that was empty and unlighted for most of its length. Clients and consultant had to walk down the dark, barren corridor to the far end where his chair was set up in front of a narrow couch, with a single spot light shining on the couch where his clients sat.

This Jewish man had been a child during the Nazi occupation of his homeland. His parents were deported to concentration camps but he escaped and was hidden for several years by friends, neighbors and strangers. "My formative experience," he said, "was not surviving. It was fleeing from one dangerous haven to the next. I felt as if all the powers of the universe pointed their destructive weapons only at me."

This man's soul dwelt in a perpetual darkness. It could only function in a setting that simultaneously replicated a refuge in the underground and an interrogation chamber in which the destructive forces might have seated him. His soul lived and worked, at once and eternally, in hiding from the world seeking his destruction, and in the hot seat being both interrogated for destruction and tortured for surviving.

Another woman client had been left behind in Warsaw when her parents, active members of the resistance, fled the Nazis. She had been deported for extermination, and only saved while on a cattle car by the timely arrival of Allied troops. Then, at age 6, during the Communist occupation of Poland, she had had to flee across the wilderness with her two younger sisters.

All her adult life, this woman experienced the impossibility of love and safety. No amount of pleading for pity or reassurance from lovers or husbands, no degree of professional success, no amount of obsessive control or planning could provide this woman's soul with the deepening, centering, or belonging she craved. Instead, she lived her adult decades in a puddle of tears and terror. It was as if, with the dawn of each day, with the attempt to connect and root in every therapy session, she had to begin anew in the cattle cars and discover whether she would live or die.

The primary movement in all these souls is toward a survival which they can hardly believe in. Their deepening is into the darkness, as if they had roots that stretched far into the underworld but sent no sprouts into the light. The destructive and degenerative aspects of life fully penetrated their souls so that they could not believe in or experience the counterbalancing, regenerative powers. As a result, it was only with the greatest effort that they were able to eat, sleep, work, or maintain loving relationships.

Extreme violence demolishes the normally rigid barrier between the day world and the dark inner world. These worlds now interpenetrate. Time as continuity, as past and present, disappears. It is replaced by a simultaneity of actual and remembered events and an eternality of the presence of horror. Finally, all the choices for these lost souls between what is good or bad for them are reduced to questions of safety and survival. It is good to be alive for one more day. It is good to eat this meal. It is good to feel safe for this hour. It is good not to hurt another or to be hurt by another at this moment. Those principles that were experienced as ultimate in the fields of danger become their ethical codes. These souls are lost because they are trapped in disconnection. They can neither leave the ecology of horror nor balance it with principles and experiences from the world of day.

## V: Dead Souls

There is another way in which souls are lost during extreme violence. This concerns the souls of the dead.

We Americans still have over 2,000 missing in action from the Vietnam War. But the Vietnamese record over 250,000 missing in action. The Vietnam War was so brutal with its massive bombings, napalm, white phosphorous, Agent Orange and other destructive modern weaponry, that such numbers are not surprising.

In Vietnamese Buddhist belief, after death a soul cannot move on from this world to the spirit world if the person is not given the proper burial rites. Today, many Vietnamese country people report that theirs is a country of lost souls trapped in the limbo between the physical and spiritual planes, unable to continue their karmic journeys. The Vietnamese have made great efforts to recover as many of their missing as possible.

“If you can’t identify them by name, we’ll be burdened by their deaths for the rest of our lives,” the head of the MIA team had said.... His entire life was gathering corpses. He was preoccupied with this sole duty... He used to describe his work as though it were a sacred oath, and ask others to swear their dedication.”<sup>8</sup>

Vietnamese people report encounters with these unreleased souls:  
...His group had found a half-buried coffin. It had popped up like a termite hill on a riverbank... Inside the coffin was a thick plastic bag, similar to the ones Americans used for their dead, but this one was clear plastic. The soldier seemed to be still breathing, as though in deep sleep.... His handsome, youthful face had a serious air and his body appeared to be still warm...  
Then before their eyes the plastic bag discoloured, whitening as though suddenly filled with smoke. The bag glowed and something seemed to escape from it, causing the bag to deflate. When the smoke cleared, only a yellowish ash remained.  
Kien and his platoon were astounded and fell to their knees around it, raising their hands to heaven praying for a safe flight for the departed soul...<sup>9</sup>

They also report hearing or seeing these lost souls crying in anguish, begging for help to be released from limbo and move on:

Sometimes the dead manifested themselves as sounds rather than shadows. Others in the MIA team... said they'd heard the dead playing musical instruments and singing. They said... deep inside the ancient forest, the ageless trees whispered along with a song that merged into harmony with an ethereal guitar, singing, *O victorious years and months, O endless suffering and pain.*<sup>10</sup>

An even more grievous sense of souls lost to violence is found in Zulu and some other traditional people's beliefs. One of the most gruesome forms of killing perpetrated against Blacks in South Africa during apartheid was called "necklacing." In "necklacing," "the person's head is tied into a tire filled with gasoline, and he is burned alive..." Stephen Larsen comments, "'necklacing' is horrible to the African traditionalist, because it is believed that if a person dies in this manner, his or her very soul, as well as the body, perishes."<sup>11</sup> These souls, the Zulus believe, are not lost and wandering, but destroyed and lost forever.

Similarly, in medieval times burning at the stake was not done solely to purify the offending soul of sin. Rather, some folk beliefs held that death by fire utterly destroyed the soul. Burning at the stake was sometimes an attempt, not merely to kill enemies and terrify their survivors into submission, but to eradicate the souls of offenders or enemies from the cosmos.<sup>12</sup> If we take into account the folk beliefs of a people against whom we wage war, we discover that our forms of destruction may not be aimed at the people, military, culture or political systems we call enemies, but against their very souls.

The pragmatic perspective on MIAs from Vietnam argues that we would naturally have a significant number of people missing in action from such a brutal war. Is it possible that our long-standing national anguish over this issue unites us with our former enemies? Is it possible that we Americans sense in some soulful place that the souls of the missing and the violently slain are not at peace, and that they cannot be at peace until we recover their bodies and their names and propitiate their souls? Perhaps unknowingly our anguish corresponds with ancient folk and religious beliefs that rituals, sacrifices and offerings on the part of the living are necessary to aid the souls of the dead.

Awareness of the lost souls of the dead brings us to an archetypal understanding of some recurring nightmares suffered by war survivors. Such nightmares are one of the most common and troublesome symptoms of PTSD. In their sleep, former comrades see their buddies or their enemies killed over and over again. Or they see the dead return to them, sometimes looking alive, sometimes as living dead. If the souls of the violently killed are lost and wandering, perhaps it is not just a traumatic memory impression that plagues the survivor. James Hillman has argued that dreams are paths to the Underworld through which the images of the invisible can return to us as visible. PTSD nightmares of the dead may serve as gateways to the Underworld through which the restless lost souls can return to the living and cry to them for aid. Perhaps in their dreamlife, war survivors perceive as Odysseus did on his descent to Hades. There he saw the shades of the dead gather and press on him with their eternal anguish.

Like our veterans, Odysseus was a survivor of a brutal war. He became lost on the homeward journey, and could not complete it without first successfully descending to the Underworld and meeting, in addition to a wise elder guide and his mother, the restless souls of dead comrades. In fact, the first command Odysseus received in the Underworld was

from his unburied companion Elpenor, who was “missing in action” on Circe’s isle. Elpenor’s shade instructed his captain to return to his death site and give his body proper burial. The witnesses of Homer, the Vietnamese people, and veterans’ nightmares are all saying that warriors cannot complete their return without putting their missing in action comrades’ souls to rest.

In classical belief, the dead needed an offering of live blood in order to speak. Odysseus slew sacrificial animals to provide that blood. In our era, it may be the living blood of survivors that the souls of the dead, during dreamtime, gather to drink.

## VI: Recovering Souls Lost in War

What possibilities exist for aiding these souls lost in the war zones of the world? Ironically, it is their very lost condition that can lead us to clues for their, and our, recovery.

The most frightening survivors of military exploit are not those suffering PTSD. If we let ourselves hear their anguish, theirs seems to be the sanest response to horrific conditions. Rather, the most frightening survivors are those who, after a sojourn in hell, still display a strong ego. They aren’t disturbed. They don’t feel pain and loss. They don’t worry for their souls.

One woman in psychotherapy was the daughter of a traumatized World War II veteran. Just out of high school, she married a young Vietnam combat veteran. They divorced and she lived with a Polish survivor of Nazi labor camps for twenty years. He drank himself into a stupor every night, during which time he beat and sexually abused her. “I thought his soul was strong and beautiful because he didn’t show any pain or disturbance,” she said. A strong ego displayed in response to horrific experience is a form of defense, denial, and soul loss. “I thought my own soul was weak and petty because I hurt so bad and my pain made it difficult for me to function. Through therapy I realized that my pain, fear and sorrow was a sign that my soul was still alive and kicking, while the souls of all my men were lost, damaged or dead.”

Those very people whose souls are terribly lost due to their time in the war zone are the ones who have the most to teach us about the effects of violence on soul. But how can we make soul out of this lost condition?

### Recovering the Memory of Soul Loss

Archetypally, the souls of those lost in war are still wandering in the war zone. The psyche has been so impacted by horror that horror has replaced present reality as the landscape of soul. It is critical that such people develop this awareness that they are lost and stuck in the horror. They must rediscover how, when, where their soul loss occurred. Psychotherapy and other forms of healing can then become the imaginal quest for their own lost souls.

Commonly, war survivors suffering PTSD are simultaneously trapped in the ecology of war and using all the defenses at their command, including a strong ego, to avoid feeling the pain and terror of their lost and entrapped condition. It typically takes recognition of the soul loss and familiarity with the ecology of war by the guide to steadily lead the survivor to the recognition of soul loss. The survivor must be willing to descend to the underworld and wander the landscape of horror yet again. This time, a

second descent into the war zone can be done imaginally and with support. Memories and their accompanying feelings can and should be relived not solely as traumatic events needing catharsis and witness. Ezra Pound had Tiresias ask Odysseus, “A second time? why? man of ill star,/ Facing the sunless dead and the joyless region?”<sup>13</sup> . Saying “yes” to the necessary second, imaginal descent itself becomes a moment of soul restoration. This is the context in which the individual may become willing to descend a second time into the fields of horror. The imaginal descent becomes a personal odyssey into the underworld in search for one’s lost soul.

### Realignment with the Good

During war, soldiers are transformed from complex human beings into benumbed instruments of destruction. Even if at war for highly moral purposes, such as ending genocide or preserving the lives of loved ones, men and women become servants of Ares, the savage god, the destroyer. To effect this transformation, soldiers undergo a moral inversion, wherein good and evil, creation and destruction, life and death exchange places in the soul. The souls of warriors realign with the values, forces and syntax of death and destruction.

Socrates said that the soul is that which distinguishes the good, and that the good life consists in choosing what is good for the soul. Thus, in order to return from the inner landscape of war, a soul must realign its ethical system, leaving off its loyalty to the god of destruction and recovering what is life-affirming and truly good for the soul.

### Reconciliation with the Dead

Vietnamese, Zulus, and other traditional peoples tell us that the living are responsible for the souls of their dead. Native Americans teach that this responsibility extends to our enemies, those whose lives we take in combat. “When you kill an enemy warrior, you become responsible for his soul.”<sup>14</sup> If warriors do not propitiate the souls of their dead, including their enemies, that soul is trapped and can turn against and harm the survivor. But if properly propitiated, then its powers can enter the survivor. Without proper attendance to the souls of the dead, then souls of both dead and living are lost and at risk.

There are many ways to support war survivors in their attempts to reconcile with the dead. Through active imagination techniques in psychotherapy, one man who was a medic in Vietnam spent most of two years slowly, steadily revisiting all the dead and wounded he had worked with in his firebase emergency room. Each of the victims had moved into his soul space and haunted him. One by one, we staged encounters with these suffering souls, sought to discover what they still wanted from him, talked to them and released them to the universe and the soul of this former medic to his present life.

Veterans often seek spontaneous reconciliation with the dead. The popularity of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C, the thousands of letters, photos, mementos left there, attests to such spontaneous reconciliation. It also underlies the need for ritual in such reconciliation work. Journeys can be planned and guided to important sacred sites, such as the Vietnam Memorial, battlefields and countries abroad in which people fought, cemeteries where their dead lie buried, in order to commune with the spirits of the dead. Service to the living in those places, such as some Vietnam veterans have done in Vietnam, profoundly aid the reconciliation process.

Rituals can be staged in and out of the therapy setting to promote reconciliation with the dead. My veterans combat group held a memorial fire on a mountaintop one Memorial Day night. It was staged in the watchfire tradition, in which fires in home villages would be kept burning until all wandering warriors out on the warpath had returned safely home. My veterans group burned a memorial watchfire to guide the souls of their dead comrades home to the spirit world. They prayed, told stories, cried out their comrades' names to the stars, thanked them and vowed to release them.

During imaginal conversations with the dead, war survivors often receive messages such as "choose life," "live for me," "return to the land of the living," "I'm glad you made it home." Regarding those lost in peace movements around the world, folksinger Holly Near sang, "I'll keep doing the work I was doing as if I were two." Reconciling with the dead means choosing to live one life as a gift received and accepted for the honor and in the memory of many.

### Deepening and Identity Reformulation

Many war survivors wish to be as they were before their military experience. They cry out to have their young, innocent selves and all their lost years returned to them. These cries are of souls in anguish at what they have seen, felt, learned in the ecology of horror. They are cries from the Underworld by souls that have not yet returned.

War can, in fact, be aligned with the natural movement of soul because it is a profound deepening. War is a most extreme form of descent into the Underworld. At first it may feel like a forced, unwilling descent. But during it, the survivor learns that which he or she never wanted to know about individual, human and earthly nature. It was to attain this wisdom that the descent was made.

One Papago ceremony of warrior's return has an elder warrior question the new young "enemy slayer" each night for 16 days during purification in this manner: "Verily, who desires this experience? Do you not desire it? Then you must endure its many hardships."<sup>15</sup> It is critical for a war survivor to develop the acceptance, even affirmation of his experiences. To return from war, the survivor must develop a new identity as witness to the Underworld. The survivor must grow that identity large enough so that it surrounds and carries the traumatic experiences. The survivor must call the soul back into service as the community's witness to both the shadow and the aesthetics of war.

"To know war we must enter its love," Hillman has written. "In our most elevated works of thought... a warrior class is imagined as necessary to the well-being of humankind."<sup>16</sup> A warrior is one who knows the love of war. This is not to love destruction or killing. Rather, through the love of war a warrior embraces the beauty and fragility of life, the depth and compassion of extreme comradeship, the wisdom and humility that comes from experiencing oneself as an instrument of Ares, and the commitment to serve humanity as an instrument of justice. By becoming a warrior, a soul is recomposed, regenerated. A warrior's soul again becomes a prime mover.

A soul before war is innocent. A soul is likely to have become wounded or lost during war through its exposure to horror and extreme violence. The way for a soul to return to life and world is by way of consent: I had this experience. I needed it. I have taken the long, difficult road. I have been initiated. I am now a warrior, and will serve the code and embody the quality of warriors - "courage, nobility, honor, loyalty,

steadfastness of principle, comradely love”<sup>17</sup> all my days. It is by becoming a warrior that the soul lost in war may return.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> James Hillman, The Dream and the Underworld. (New York: Harper, 1979), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-7.

<sup>4</sup> J.D. Salinger, “For Esme - With Love and Squalor,” Nine Stories (New York: Bantam, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> See Edward Tick, “The Vietnam War and the American Shadow,” Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture, 62, Fall & Winter, 1997, for a more extensive archetypal approach to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Tick, Sacred Mountain: Encounters with the Vietnam Beast (Santa Fe: Moon Bear Press, 1979), p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> For such a narrative of one marine’s experience of soul loss in Vietnam during the burning of a Vietnamese village, see Tick, “Vietnam and the American Shadow,” pp. 76-77.

<sup>8</sup> Bao Ninh, The Sorrow of War (London: Minerva, 1994), pp. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 83

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, Song of the Stars, Stephen Larsen, ed. (Barrytown: Station Hill, 1996), p. xxviii.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Larsen, personal communication.

<sup>13</sup> Ezra Pound, Selected Cantos (New York: New Directions, 1970) p. 5 Canto I is Pound’s translation of Book XI of Homer’s Odyssey, the descent to Hades. Only with this line does Pound turn the ancient odyssey into a modern intellectual and spiritual odyssey, declaring the necessity for contemporary pilgrims to make the ancient descent.

<sup>14</sup> General Grant, Lakota Elder, personal communication.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Silver, “Lessons from Child of Water,” Report of the Working Group on American Indian Vietnam Era Veterans (Washington, DC: Readjustment Counseling Service, Dept. of Veterans Affairs, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> James Hillman, A Blue Fire, ed. Thomas Moore (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 180.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 181.