

— A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE —

Healing the invisible wounds of war

A Christian Science perspective: Overcoming trauma experienced in war.

February 22, 2016

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Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, has been described as the face of the invisible wounds of war. At a major US military hospital a unique art therapy class uses maskmaking as a tool to help servicemen and women see that the trauma is separate from their identity.

When I heard about this program, it reminded me of a concept I have learned in my study of Christian Science that recognizes the pure and untouched spiritual nature of each one of us. The masks of trauma or anything else that would attempt to obscure our true, pure, and spiritual selfhood, truly have no permanence in our lives.

The Bible tells us that God created us in His perfect image and likeness and that the love of our divine Parent awakens us to who we really are, reaching and saving even those who seem to be mentally far from help. The book of Isaiah in

the Bible records: “bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him” (43:6, 7).

As we open up our thought in prayer to feel God’s great love and care for us, we become receptive to the love that replaces dark thoughts with peace and stability. My friend Bill experienced something of this peace while serving in the Vietnam War as a rifle platoon leader in the 101st Airborne Division. Bill began learning about his relationship to God in Christian Science Sunday School as a young boy up to the age of twenty, but he drifted from these teachings in the army. It was on the battlefields of Vietnam that he reconnected with God – partly through the earnest prayers of his mother and the pocket-sized edition of “Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures,” by Mary Baker Eddy, that she had tucked into his Army duffel. Bill’s wake-up call came in the mountains during a particularly heated battle, when a North Vietnamese Army regiment had his company and another company trapped and outnumbered.

Bill told me, “As I began to think, ‘We’ll have to kill as many as we can,’ I suddenly caught myself. I sat in my foxhole and the thought came: ‘Everything is OK.’” He says it was a clear thought, as though God were speaking to him. At that moment his commander told him he’d figured out a way to withdraw out of the trap. Sometime after their safe escape, Bill started reading his copy of Science and Health and praying again. He says, “I became blind to the images of war [when] my eyes were open to God’s evidence. It was truly like taking a mask off to see who I really was.” He later realized that the war couldn’t change who he was, spiritually, and that his connection to God determined his permanent identity. To him, God’s evidence of good was expressed in the peace he felt, despite the atrocities of war to which he was exposed.

Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of Christian Science, discussed the importance of exposing fear and evil – or whatever would obscure our purity and goodness as God’s children – in Science and Health. She wrote: “Expose and denounce the

claims of evil and disease in all their forms, but realize no reality in them” (p. 447). Doing so would bring victory over these ailments and effect healing, much in the way my friend experienced.

Bill’s service in Vietnam became an opportunity to prove what he was learning about God. He began to expect answers to his prayers and he clung to the truths in the 23rd Psalm: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (verse 4).

Bill says that when he returned home, he never felt traumatized by the war, something he attributes entirely to prayer. On several occasions, he’s been able to share hope and encouragement with soldiers returning from the war in Afghanistan. His strength comes from the understanding of his real identity, never touched by the wounds of war.