

## The Spiritual Backfire Of War

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A moving article by Michael Meade on the effects of war on those involved long after they return.

M/M

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I want to give a report on a recent retreat with a group of veterans of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf and Vietnam. I want you to know how courageous they were in telling them. I'd like their voices to be heard over the din of the political battles and the mostly abstract arguments about whether it is too soon to bring troops home. The problem is that too many of those who go off

to war fail to find a way back from it. The problem is that the war continues to live inside the wounded bodies, the rattled nerves and the battered souls.

The depth of sorrow in a woman's voice pours out as she struggles through tears to read her poem about losing her husband after he returned from the war. It may be her first poem ever, born of palpable tragedy and honest grief. She doesn't think she could read it in public, yet she knows that she speaks for many others stranded on the road between life and death. She knows because she was in the military herself, because her husband committed suicide after years of battling with PTSD. She calls them the "walking dead" — the ones who make it back from the war but can't make it back into life.

*"The war was over, that's what they said;  
but not for the warriors and the walking dead.  
Dropped back into life, like they were never gone,  
the war still raging, hidden deep inside.  
The horrors, the killing, just learning to cope;  
the anger and fighting, alcohol and dope.*

*The hole in our family, the loss that we feel;  
they say it gets better, with time we all heal.  
The war was over, that's what they said;  
but not for the families of the walking dead."*

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