

Building Spiritual Awareness, Fitness, and Resiliency

A holistic view of life

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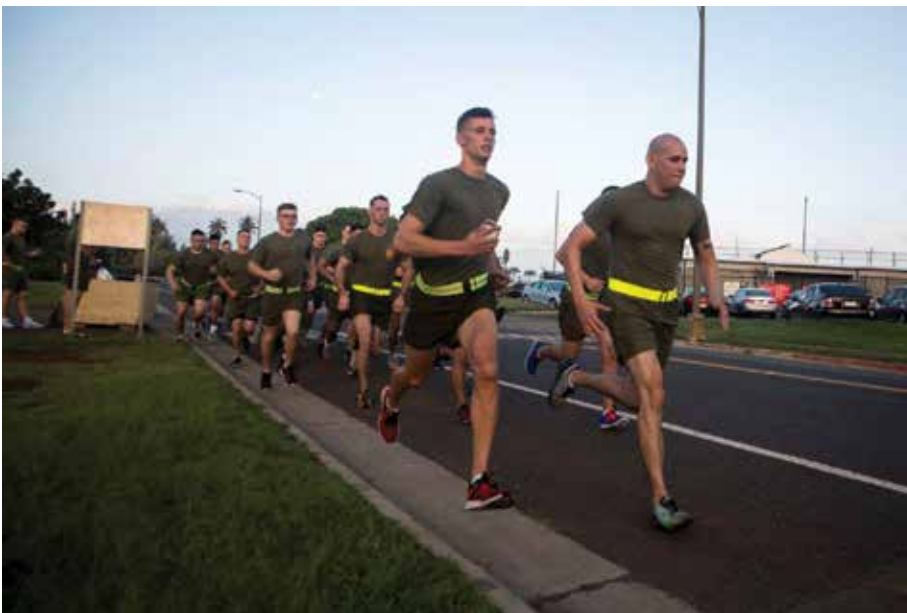
In October 2016, the Commandant of the Marine Corps released *ALMAR 033/16* addressing spiritual fitness in the Corps.¹ He emphasized that Marines are not only physical, mental, and social beings, but also spiritual; that spiritual resiliency is an important part of overall well-being and the individual's ability to "grow, develop, recover, heal and adapt." The Commandant asked the Marine Corps to begin reflecting on the meaning of spiritual well-being, questioning what it means to become spiritually resilient in the same way that Marines strive to be physically, mentally, and socially fit. To demonstrate this desire, the Commandant placed *What It Is Like to Go to*

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*War*² by Karl Marlantes, a highly-decorated Marine of the Vietnam War, on his Professional Reading List. Marlantes addresses his experiences of war in the context of its psychological and spiritual effects, discussing how preparation and training *for* war along with exercises and programs *after* war can better mitigate war's impact on the individual while instilling self-awareness in actions and decision making *during* war.

Reformed theologian John Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by stating that "without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and ourselves."³ The purpose of this article is to introduce the thesis that knowledge of self can be developed through the contemporary understanding of psychological type outlined through the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), which can be used as a tool to not only deepen our knowledge of ourselves in general but also to develop our knowledge of God as we use related exercises in order to build spiritual awareness, understanding, and resiliency according to our unique personality.

The Christian Scriptures tell us that humans have a soul and that the essence of the human connection with God is in the soul. The fundamental depth of our being is our soul, and the home of our personality traits is the soul. The soul is comprised of three parts—mind, body and spirit—and is defined as "the principle of life, feeling, thought, and actions in humans."⁴ The three parts working in harmony provide what is necessary to have a resilient spirit. The interplay between mind, body, and spirit is paramount in our understanding of their nourishment of the soul. There is a continual triangle of movement and interplay between the three parts—in the exercise of our spirit, we are using our mind and our body; in the exercise of our body, we are addressing our mind and our spirit; and in the exercise of our



Marines strive to be physically fit, but what about spiritually fit? (Photo by LCpl Jesus Sepulveda-Torres.)

spirit, we are using our body and mind. To have balance in all aspects suggests an extremely holistic view of life.

The U.S. Marine Corps defines spiritual fitness as “an optimal state of the overall spiritual well-being of a person that touches on three fundamental elements: personal faith, foundational values and moral living.”⁵ As Marines and Sailors who are physical, mental, social, and spiritual beings, it is necessary to have practical spiritual resources and leadership development practices capable of strengthening an individual’s spiritual well-being. The MBTI is one such readily-available resource among Navy chaplains.

The use of a psychological type is simply one technique to develop our knowledge of true self and the nourishment of our soul in the quest for knowledge of God, higher power, or

noble path. The root word of psychology is *psyche*, meaning the human soul. Thus, in order to understand our spiritual make-up and how we practice spiritual disciplines, we should be grounded in our knowledge of our soul type. As we learn our type in general, and spiritual profile in specific, we reflect and act (through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, worship, music, arts and crafts, acts of service, nature, study, physical exercise, or even sleep) on who we are and how our spiritual personalities interact with our faith or belief in a higher power. Our spiritual journey is a life-long one in which we are continuously growing. We should never be wholly satisfied with where we are as we recognize that that there is always room for growth.

The beginning point of self-reflection is the determination of our particular

psychological type. Every individual has their own genetic make-up, and though God “broke the mold” after birth, there are common characteristics in individual personalities which can be noted as similar in others and grouped accordingly. These universal characteristics were originally noted by Carl Jung in 1923, and they eventually became known as psychological type. Concurrently, Katharine Briggs had begun her own research in 1917, and after Jung’s publication, Briggs expanded her research in conjunction with her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers. Together, they spent 1923–1941 developing their own typological ideas and theory, refining their work until it began to be utilized in the mid-1960s as a useful tool for clinicians and researchers.⁶ Their work is now known as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and it is the most well-known tool for measuring psychological

PREFERRED ATTITUDE FUNCTION OR LIFESTYLE	EXTRAVERSION E	INTROVERSION I	SENSING S	INTUITION I	THINKING T	FEELING F	JUDGEMENT J	PERCEPTION P
PRIMARY ARENA	World, Other	Ideas, Self	Body	Spirit	Mind	Heart	Will	Awareness
PREFERENCE FOR	Action	Reflection	Sensory reality Details Status Quo	Possibilities Patterns Change	Objective Principles	Subjective Values	Initiative	Response
NATURAL SPIRITUAL PATH	Action	Reflection	Service	Awareness	Knowledge	Devotion	Discipline	Spontaneity
NEEDED FOR WHOLENESS	Reflection	Action or Participation	Awareness or Understanding	Service or Embodiment	Devotion	Knowledge	Spontaneity	Discipline

Figure 1. Finding your spiritual path through Meyers-Briggs. (Adapted from a chart by Earle C. Page given as a handout at a MBTI workshop at Farifax, VA in 2004.)

type. It is possible to use the MBTI to explore how we practice our spirituality according to our soul type.

The MBTI is not a test but a self-reporting instrument that assumes that type is inborn. Its results sort individuals into one of each of four dichotomies which address how an individual relates to the world. The first dichotomy addresses the direction of an individual's energy—E (Extraversion)/I (Introversion); the second, how an individual gathers data—S (Sensing)/P (Perceiving); the third dichotomy addresses how an individual makes decisions—T (Thinking)/F (Feeling); and the fourth dichotomy determines the individual's orientation to the outer world—J (Judging)/P (Perceiving). The first and last pairings (E/I and J/P) are described as attitudes while the middle pairings (S/N and T/F) are regarded as functions. Sixteen possible combinations are identified with every individual falling into one of the 16 types.⁷

At this point, it is necessary to give a brief overview of what type theory calls the dominant and auxiliary functions, which in turn leads to the *shadow*.⁸ In their four letter MBTI profile, each individual has a dominant and auxiliary function. The first and last letters of the four letter combination are called the *attitudes*, while the middle two letters represent the *functions*. Of the two *functions*, the individual has preferences for each, which in turn is described as the *dominant* (the most preferred function the *commanding general*) and the *auxiliary* (the second most well-developed and dependable function/the *loyal lieutenant*). The third most developed is called the *tertiary* function, and it is the opposite of the auxiliary function and is used more in the unconscious than the conscious. The *inferior* function is the least developed of the combination, and it is the opposite in every way of the dominant function. It is also the gateway to the shadow, which is the collective name of the two inferior functions. As an example, for an ISTJ (the most common military type), the dominant function is an introverted senser, the auxiliary is extraverted thinker, the tertiary is feeler, and the inferior is extraverted intuitive. Our shadow type is also sometimes described as the four letter

ISTJ: DOING WHAT SHOULD BE DONE



How do we decide? (Image by CW02 Matt Andrew.)

combination, which is the opposite of an individual's actual type. For example, the shadow of an INFJ is ESTP; the shadow of ISTJ is ENFP, etc.⁹

The pathways presented in Figure 1 (previous page) can be used as a guide for the individual to explore their spirituality according to MBTI preferences and are intended to open the individual to new aspects of their spirituality in their search for, and journey toward, wholeness. The chart is oriented toward discovering some of the primary characteristics of one's unique personality as it relates to the spiritual life. Each of the eight MBTI preferences is listed across the top while categories of the spiritual life are listed in the first column. The words or phrases in each category are meant to help the individual gain a better understanding of their particular

spirituality and are not strict definitions. While the "Natural Spiritual Path" suggests the primary orientation of a particular type (such as "Action"), the category "Needed for Wholeness" indicates the opposite orientation ("Reflection") that is needed for a balanced spirituality. For example, an ESTP wants action, service, knowledge, and discipline in the spiritual world. However, for spiritual wholeness, the ESTP also needs to incorporate reflection, awareness/understanding, devotion, and spontaneity into their practices.

In a video interview entitled *Leadership Lessons*, Retired Gen James N. Mattis responded to the question, "How do you keep improving as a leader to meet the demand of each role in your career?" He noted that,



Spiritual awareness is gained from reading, studying, and applying what you learn about your faith to both your life and your relationships with those around you. (Photo by Cpl Zachery B Martin.)

not only is it necessary to stay teachable as a leader and to be a better warfighter at the end of each week than at the beginning; it is essential to maintain the body, mind and spirit at all times in order to be the physically toughest, the mentally sharpest and the most spiritually undiminished possible.¹⁰

In the same interview, Mattis declined to name one of the 11 leadership principles as more important than any other because they are all parts of the whole; there is no way to separate them. The same can be said when applying spirituality to the leadership principles. Spirituality is a necessary component of all the principles in the same way it undergirds the six functional areas of leadership development—fidelity, fighter, fitness, family, finances, and future.

Without knowledge of self, there can be no knowledge of God; without knowledge of God, there can be no growth or development of the spiritual elements of a Marine seeking overall fitness and resiliency. Psychological type and the MBTI profile (along with associated spiritual exercises) are valuable tools that gives individuals the ability to understand themselves more effectively, thus allowing them to grow in their spiritual awareness and resiliency. An analogy which can be used is that of a three-legged stool with each of the

legs representing mind, body, and spirit. If one of the legs is weak or broken, the stool will fall over. Humans are multi-dimensional beings, designed to live our lives aware of our mind, body, spirit, and community—all of these elements inform our relationships with both humanity and God. The MBTI spiritual profile is a valuable tool for exploring avenues of spirituality that take us beyond our traditional constructs to accept practices to which we are naturally drawn as legitimate soul work. The MBTI spiritual profile can encourage Marines to engage in legitimate soul work to build spiritual awareness, fitness, and resiliency as they develop leadership, decision-making skills, and teamwork.¹¹

Notes

1. Headquarters Marine Corps, *ALMAR 033/16, Spiritual Fitness*, (Washington, DC: October 2016).
2. Karl Marlantes, *What It is Like to Go to War*, (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2011).
3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960).
4. *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 2003).

5. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Spiritual Fitness Communications Plan*, (Washington, DC: 2016).

6. Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type*, (Mountain View, CA: CAPT, 1980).

7. Otto Kroger, *MBTI Qualifying Workshop Manual*, (Fairfax, VA: 2001).

8. Marlantes addresses the existence of the shadow primarily in Chapter 5, "The Enemy Within." Jung's shadow refers to "an archetype which is an innate mode of psychic behavior, in reaction to certain situations. There are archetypal modes of action and reaction, processes, attitudes, ideas and ways of assimilating experience. The shadow as an archetype is that part of Collective Unconscious which intrudes itself into the personal sphere, forming the Personal Unconscious. It personifies everything that people refuse to acknowledge about themselves, such as inferior traits of character and other tendencies incompatible with and unacceptable to their conscious, ego-dominated view of self." Naomi L. Quenk, *MBTI News*, (Kansas City, MO: 1982.)

9. When stationed at Naval Submarine Base New London, CT (2008–2012), one of my responsibilities was Brig Chaplain. On one occasion, there were six young Sailors from the BESS (Basic Enlisted Submarine School) in pre-trial confinement for getting involved in a drug ring. When I administered the MBTI to them, all six were either ENFP or INFP. These two types in particular have a natural disregard for rules and regulations and are most likely to "get into trouble." Experience has taught me that if a Marine or Sailor is in their first enlistment and is under the age of 24 years, he will struggle in the military environment if an ENFP or INFP.

10. United States Marine Corps, *Leadership Lessons from Gen. James Mattis (Ret.)*, (Washington, DC: 2016).

11. This article is based on the author's doctor of ministry thesis, "The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a Tool for Spiritual Growth: A Case Study Among Female Chaplains in the United States Navy," (doctorate thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2016). The ISTJ spiritual exercises are offered as an example of how to build spiritual resiliency.

