

## Soul Work

“Soul work” is the process of bringing the essential self—the soul—out of hiding. Sometimes life’s trauma can present a brick wall, and it is “soul work” that helps shine light and bring healing once again. Any challenge we face can be an entrance into the discovery of our truest self, and any problem we have can help lead us toward wholeness. Our job is to get rid of the useless fear, anxiety, and self-shaming that actually hides the light of the soul.

The soul is a part of us that never completely dies. Our soul is our core. Our soul carries all the messages, lessons, and pain that we have learned and experienced in our past.

The soul is our capacity to see that our lives are about something more than simply the day to day and that we are here for a purpose. Our soul can be connected to faith and religion or not, but for me, God is always present.

Presently I am the only female chaplain colonel in the United States Army. Talented female chaplain colonels have gone before me, and others will come after me. Each human who is put on this earth has a soul and a purpose. When I graduated from seminary in 1988, I never would have dreamed the journey that would be ahead of me.

My soul has been shaped to experience both beauty and trauma in the world and to be affected by it but not permanently in despair.

Like anyone, I have had things that I have not expected in my life: the death of my husband, going to war, counseling Rwandan refugees through unspeakable terror—but in all of this I have been moved to love.

It sounds simplistic, but in reality it is really quite difficult.

To love in the face of terror,

To care in the face of disaster.

To wake up each day, not in despair but willing

To make a difference with one smile and one word at a time.

To see in another person, even when you are hurting, the soul of beauty. Yes, terror

derails us, yes, tragedy slows us down, yes,

illness and political unrest is all around us, but

To see the soul of a person is to see their uniqueness and beauty from within.

As an Army chaplain, I have delivered news to two families who lost a loved one on 9-11; I have delivered hundreds of death notifications as part of

my chaplain calling. Delivering bad news is never easy, yet if you take time for the soul and be open to whatever emotions and pain arise, light can and will shine through.

In Iraq, I was the division command chaplain in charge of 15 male chaplains, many of whom didn't believe in women in the military, I told them that we were not there to debate political or theological issues; instead, we were there to make a difference for the 8,300 soldiers who were on that base. We had to be united, for we would be the moral compass and spiritual caretaker for everyone there.

We were to look out for their souls, their lives, and their spirits and be present to offer hope in the midst of war. The tender care of a soldier's soul is sacred. I have been a "keeper of souls" for 26 years as an Army chaplain. It is an honor and a profound trust.

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