



VETERAN RITES

Circle of Return

APOSTASIS

“Killing someone without splitting oneself from the feeling that the act engenders requires an effort of supreme consciousness that, quite frankly, is beyond most humans. Killing is what warriors do for society. Yet when they return home, society doesn’t generally acknowledge that the act it asked them to do created a deep split in their psyches, or a psychological and spiritual weight most of them will stumble beneath the rest of their lives. Warriors must learn how to integrate the experience of killing, to put the pieces of their psyches back together again. For the most part, they have been left to do this on their own.”

Karl Marlantes, What It Is Like To Go To War





































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After a 14-year career in the US Army infantry with heavy combat in Afghanistan, Mark Oravsky was on the brink of suicide, seeking a place where he could **“dig a hole and scream in to it.”** In his last attempt to keep his finger off the trigger he discovered a Rite of Return to wholeness and sense of belonging in the world as ancient as war itself.

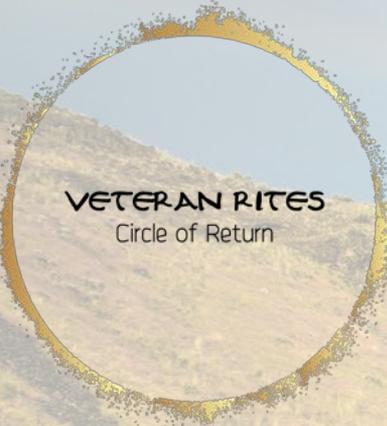


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Having experienced the true welcoming home that is every warrior's birthright, Mark began piloting a 12-day ceremony of return for veterans with the guidance and support of the School of Lost Borders, with an independent study to evaluate program efficacy by Seattle University.

Armed with the empirical evidence of veteran transformation from three Rite of Returns, quantitative data to back it up, and an imminent documentary, VeteranRites is crossing the threshold to scale this ceremony in order to bring our warriors back from preventable death, isolation, depression, fear, anxiety, and sense of belonging in the world.

Who am I? What is my purpose? How am I going to live a life of meaning?



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VeteranRites initiates prior services members back to their whole selves through a rite of deep wilderness immersion, surrounded by peers and elders, separated from society for a time, in order to set new intentions for their lives.

This warrior-led ceremony has proven to drastically reduce the symptoms of PTS, compassion fatigue, moral injury, and suicidal ideation by embracing all aspects of our human nature, identity, and experience.

The 12-day rite of passage is a pancultural, evidence based ceremony that completes a warrior's psychological return from military indoctrination and identity. This cleansing is an essential and timeless practice of sacred decompression and discovery that is lost in today's society.

Rite of Return

Severance (days 1-4):

Participants travel to a wilderness setting and set up a base camp where they become accustomed to living close to the land, opening their senses to the features of that place, and tuning in to the rhythms of the Earth.

Participants identify their reasons for participating, inner resources, and commitment to this undertaking through council-style group discussions and simple Earth-centered ceremonies along with walks, journaling, and contemplative practices such as meditation and sensory awareness. Issues of logistics, equipment, and personal and group safety are addressed.



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Circle of Return

Rite of Return

Threshold (days 5-8):

This phase is comprised of four days of solitude and fasting from food (with water, a buddy system, and other safeguards).

Participants may engage in awareness practices and self-generated ceremonies. This phase is the point where the participant is called to draw upon their inner self to face the fears, doubts, and challenges that will inevitably arise. In many ways, the threshold time represents a symbolic death and facilitates an ego-death.



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Rite of Return

Return (days 9-12):

The return, or reincorporation, phase is a symbolic rebirth. Upon return to base camp, there is a quiet celebration and time to slowly integrate back into the company of others.

Through reflection and story sharing, participants begin to integrate their insights and experiences, gaining understanding of their experience and how it has altered their perceptions, emotions, and sense of self. The goal is to help participants discover their own meaning in their experiences and apply their own belief systems, not to impose meaning.





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Incorporation:

After the wilderness journey, participants are supported in bringing their experiences into their lives more fully. Often this means embodying the creative, wild, disciplined, active, and loving ways of being previously suppressed by trauma.

Initiated veterans focus primarily on living out their new intention by sharing their unique gifts and practical tools they have cultivated during their Rite of Return.

Warriors are encouraged to participate in training that will empower them to become guides, facilitators of council, and peer support guardians in their communities.



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An aerial photograph of a group of approximately 15 people sitting in a circle on the ground in a natural, outdoor setting. They are surrounded by dry earth and some green vegetation. The people are dressed in casual outdoor attire, including hats and jackets. The overall atmosphere is one of community and shared experience.

Rite of Return

Initiating Veterans to Wholeness

Mindfulness
Contemplation
Meditation
Awareness
Body-Scanning
Physical Exertion
Motivational Interviewing
Mirroring for Empowerment
Animals, Plants, Adventure
Active Listening
Empathy & Anger
Touch, Humor, Sarcasm
Movement & Yoga
Bonding & Belonging
Creative Expression
Freedom. Solitude. Time
Self-Generated Ceremony
Honesty & Accountability
Forgiveness & Fear
Magic, Mystery, Myth

Giving Form to Trauma
Purification
Nature Walks
Teachings & Council
Self-Determination
Elders, Peers, Ancestors
Spiritual Exploration
Grief & Tears
Affirmation
Inclusion
Being Seen
Witnessing
Diversity
Storytelling
Guardianship
Joy & Playfulness
Love of Self
Love of Others
Love of Earth
Identity, Purpose, Direction

Where we stand

Three 12-day Rite of Return ceremonies and one pilot initiating 24 veterans and one civilian back to wholeness.

Ongoing independent study published in the flagship journal of the American Counseling Association.

[Cherilee A. Targem, Ph.D., Brock K. M. P. Dorasbucker, M.A., Ph.D. "Rites of Passage Ceremonies in Relation to Well-Being: Journal of Counseling & Development"](#)

Guided participants suffering from Post Traumatic Stress, Suicidal Ideation, Military Sexual Trauma, Traumatic Brain Injury, Alcoholism, Moral Injury, Survivor's Guilt, Combat-Related Disabilities, Depression, Isolation, Type 1 Diabetes, Racism, Sexism, Ageism, Homelessness, and Permanent Blindness.

A place of belonging for all veterans of every era, and affirming women, minority, and lgbtq warriors.

Documentary Film forthcoming from [Warrior Film](#) by Academy Award nominated documentarian Frederick Marx (Hoop Dreams).

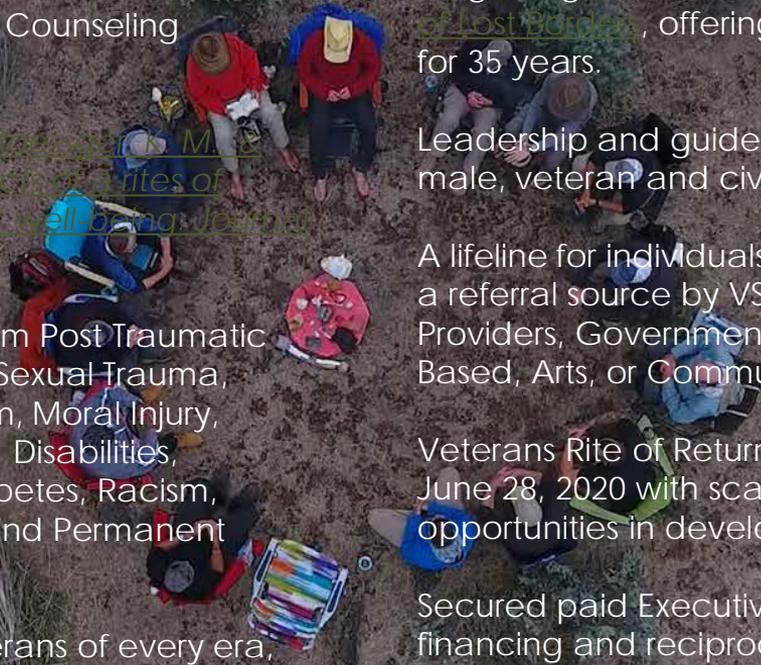
Program guidance and support through the [School of Lost Borders](#), offering world class rites of passage for 35 years.

Leadership and guides balanced with female and male, veteran and civilian.

A lifeline for individuals and families with potential as a referral source by VSOs, Therapists, Service Providers, Governmental, Corporate, Civic, Faith-Based, Arts, or Community-Based Organizations.

Veterans Rite of Return scheduled for June 17 – June 28, 2020 with scalable and multi-modal opportunities in development.

Secured paid Executive Director position to secure financing and reciprocal referral partnerships to accelerate the number of initiates and save lives.



We are in this together

VeteranRites has one Rite of Return scheduled for 2020 in the wilderness of Eastern Washington for twelve veterans. We will be announcing recruitment in the fall of 2019.

A Rite of Return only requires serious commitment from the Veteran. Being trauma and veteran-informed, we work to provide whatever is physically, medically, spiritually, and economically required for a warrior to participate. Safety is priority.

We plan to announce a second Rite of Return for 2020 with the goal of scaling intentionally over the years in multiple locations. Ideally we will partner with other VSOs and agencies who will dedicate funding and referrals to initiate the veterans, families, survivors you work with. It costs anywhere from 2K - 3K a warrior (all-in).

VeteranRites are one team in a movement advancing holistic, nature-based healing for veterans and ALL of people. Please reach out to us to combine arms for advocacy, referral, training, grant opportunities, partnerships, peer support, environmental stewardship, and esprit de corps. Love to refer our initiates to YOU!

Fellow Veterans and Neighbors, it is time to reclaim our Whole Selves. The Warrior, The Veteran, and the member of community.

One warrior, one council, one Rite of Return at a time.

Ryan Mielcarek

Executive Director, VeteranRites

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