A journey away from burnout

By Chaplain Corey Thornton

While conducting research on professional fatigue recently I came across the concept of burnout. Psychologists Christina Maslach and Susan E. Jackson developed the concept in the 1970s. It was intended to identify people who were suffering with emotional exhaustion as well as a lack of enthusiasm and sense of accomplishment. The more I learned about burnout, the more I saw myself in the symptoms as well as many of those who I care for in counseling and in day to day chaplain ministry. While there is much advise, both professional and not, for relieving the symptoms of burnout, I wish to offer some guidance from my field.

If you suffer from some level of burnout, adding prayer into your life can help. It may sound like simple guidance, but prayer—and also meditation in addition to prayer--seem to go a long way towards grounding our lives in "The Bigger Picture" (aka, God). With this grounding comes a deep sense of meaning, peace and calm that guards against burnout. In his book "*If you meet George Herbert on the road, kill him: Radically Re-Thinking Priestly Ministry,*" Justin Lewis-Anthony writes, "Douglas Turton and Leslie Francis have mapped the relationship between a healthy prayer life and resistance to burnout: 'the empirical evidence suggests that people who pray enjoy a range of psychological benefits, including a greater sense of purpose in life, a higher level of satisfaction with life, and better psychological wellbeing'."

I mentioned above that to recommend the practice of prayer sounds simple, but to execute this practice in our lives is almost always a challenge. Most of us serving here in Japan are well employed and as such, I suspect that we consider ourselves well off. But I would ask us to consider the quality of our lives in terms other than economic. How would we gauge the quality of our interpersonal lives? Do we consider ourselves well off in terms of peace of heart and mind? Too often it is the case that many of us are financially well off but still live in poverty when considering these other factors. It has been shouted from the hilltops--in church pulpits, self-help lectures, popular psychological studies, etc., that materialism alone will not satisfy a human life.

Too many in our society focus their lives on their iPods, TVs, PCs, Kindles, cell phones and other devices that cannot be lived without, but most lack the patience, skill and self-discipline to begin a life of prayer. On the outside they live a blessed life, but are empty on the inside. The problem comes when ambitions to maintain material status cause our lives to become too busy to recognize our internal depravation. We should never be too busy to stop and take stock of the state of our minds and our souls. We all know what happens to our bodies when we treat them this way, but very few will tell you that our minds and our souls are also in need of care. In this type of lifestyle many find themselves crippled by burnout; particularly with the sense that they've given life their best effort just to find it disappointing and empty.

When setting out to learn about prayer and meditation one quickly finds that there are a lot of traditions and methods to inform these practices. One thing that is a requirement for most of them is solitude.

We need to be able to get alone. Physical privacy is preferred, but a private space for the mind might be enough. If we take notice, most of us will find our lives are full of noise, interruptions, busyness and a constant state of hustle and bustle. While this makes for good business, it is an impossible context for prayer and meditation. Throughout history, people have solved this problem in different ways. One notable example comes from Christians who lived in Egypt and eastern Syria in the third century.

As populations in these areas grew, people who wished to live devout lives of prayer felt compelled to leave. And so they began to form monastic communities in the hilly areas and desserts. They went to get alone with God and to support others with the same desires. Many highly prized spiritual writings came from these Dessert Fathers, revealing inner lives of great depth and maturity. They lived in simple and materially poor conditions, but enjoyed rich interpersonal lives full of meaning and purpose.

I am aware that most of us will not choose to sell all of our possessions to go live in the dessert. A less drastic option is to commit to set aside time in your life for retreats. A retreat is a time to get away from the routine of our lives, to slow things down, to make room in our hearts and minds for God. A retreat usually entails taking a trip out of town to a camping site or retreat center for a weekend. This model is a good one, but most find that they can only commit to one or two of these trips a year. This will not due for a regular life of prayer.

What I would propose instead of or in addition to these trips is to take mini-retreats. A mini-retreat might be to begin your day with 15 minutes alone for prayer and meditation. Your belief system and your cultural and religious background will likely determine how you choose to approach these times. My practice is largely informed by Christianity. Prayer for me is conversation with God. Meditation for me is contemplation on God. A text that is helpful with this form of meditation is Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." A common form of meditation includes quieting the mind to increase awareness. These are just a few concepts that have enriched my spirituality. If you have the background to engage in these practices, then let me encourage you to get alone and dive in.

If you are less familiar with these concepts, then feel encouraged to study and seek answers from authorities that you value.

My hope is that we all will lead well-considered lives, being self-aware and grounded in relationship with God. I am confident that such lives will prove resilient to burnout.

Yokosuka community leads engergy conservation charge

From CFAY PWD Public Affairs

In May 2011, the citizens and companies that live and work in Japan were asked by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) to reduce their peak electricity demand by 15 percent based on last summer's peak demand. This reduction would enable the TEPCO 50 Hz grid to support the Kanto Plains area without adverse affects of grid blackouts or brownouts.

From 01 July until 30 September 2011, Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka successfully (CFAY) stayed below the Government of Japan (GOJ) mandate of 15 percent peak electricity demand reduction as directed by USFJ. This amazing feat was not achieved by all Installations and we, CFAY Yokosuka, should be extremely proud of our accomplishments. From the awareness and participation of our community, to the fleet supporting us during their routine operations; the coordination and teamwork that was developed and maintained throughout this monitoring period was unmatched.

CFAY energy team employed a very detailed plan to meet this goal, and only with the support and participation of the tenant commands and the members of the community, were we able to be successful. We began this monitoring period by notifying the community that we would need to try and stay 25 percent below the peak demand vice the 15 percent that was mandated by Japan and USFJ. The reasoning behind this stringent goal was to allow enough time for the Installation to implement emergent, time consuming measures prior to violating the 15 percent mandate.

There were many misconceptions about the Cogeneration (COGEN) plant that had some believing that CFAY could easily meet this mandate and support other Installations with this task. We would like to now take the time and explain the actual situation for final clarification to all. First off, the COGEN plant's primary operation is support to our Fleet. The Fleet uses 60 Hz power which is a significant portion of what is generated by the COGEN plant. The COGEN is indeed capable of providing some 50Hz power, but no where near the amount needed to support our entire Installation. Second, the COGEN plant was running continuously in the summer of 2010, the same summer that was used as the baseline to determine our 15 percent reduction for 2011. So the fact that the plant was in operation again this summer, during the monitoring period, is not a benefit to CFAY. If at any time the COGEN plant had gone down during the monitoring period, we would not have been able to meet the 15 percent reduction goal due to the amount of electricity that would have had to be purchased from TEPCO to maintain the operations of CFAY.

The bottom line is that with more than twenty measures implemented for Yokosuka, Ikego, and Negishi; the credit for meeting this target and sustaining this performance goes out to everyone that is a part of CFAY. For those of you that responded to the calls for action – we say "Thank you". For those of you that made sacrifices and changed your daily routines for the cause – we say "Thank you". Every measure made a difference. From turning off a light to unplugging your appliances; the overall total is what contributed to our 24 percent peak demand reduction for the summer.

Many believed that we couldn't do it; others said we shouldn't do it, but the fact remains that CFAY would not have met this target without the commitment, dedication, and participation of our community. Thank you Yokosuka! We did it!!