Spiritual fitness

By Chaplain Douglas Vrieland

It's that time of the year again—time for the semi-annual Physical Fitness Assessment (PFA). While I don't particularly enjoy this evolution, I do appreciate the opportunity the PFA gives me to get back into shape after a long winter.

As members of a military organization, we need to keep in shape in order to minimize injuries and have the needed strength and stamina to accomplish our missions.

But, if we are going to be mission ready, we need to be more than physically fit. We need to be spiritually fit as well.

What does it mean to be spiritually fit? If there were such a thing as a SFA (Spiritual Fitness Assessment), what would it look like? Perhaps the current PFA assessment can help us think of what we need to include in a SFA.

The PFA begins with the weigh-in. After a long winter, I often find I am carrying too much extra baggage. The extra weight slows me down and puts a drain on my entire system.

Am I carrying extra weight in my spiritual life? What grudges and hurts have accumulated over the last few months that are now putting a spiritual drain on my system? Are anger and resentment starting to weigh me down? Are there wrongs that others have committed against me that I need to let go of? Whom do I need to forgive?

After the weigh-in, the PFA tests our flexibility by asking us to touch our toes. Maintaining flexibility is crucial if we are going to avoid injury. Am I flexible spiritually? Do I have the capacity to live life on life's terms, or do I have to have things go my way? Am I open to learning new ways of doing things from people who are different than me? Do I engage in black and white, right and wrong thinking, or can I see the shades of grey that are a part of life? Am I a control freak?

The Navy requires us to curl ups to test the strength of our core. It also gives us a standard to assess our spiritual core—the so-called "Core Values." These three qualities—honor, courage, and commitment—are about our character. As the old saying puts it, "Character is who you are when no one is looking." How strong is my Spiritual Core? Am I a person of integrity? Am I essentially the same person on the job as I am at home, with my family? Or am I two-faced?

Push-ups test our upper body strength. This does not come naturally for me, but is something I must work on every day. But when I have developed my upper body, I am able to carry much more weight.

The Spiritual equivalent of push-ups is service. Service is a spiritual discipline that doesn't come any more naturally to me than push-ups, and so it is something I must work at daily. When I do, I develop the spiritual muscles needed to help others carry the weight life has placed on them. When is the last time I did something for others with no expectation of anything in return? Am I a servant, or someone who constantly needs to be served?

The final test in the fitness assesment is the run, which tests aerobic ability and stamina. The run reminds me that life is a journey, and that on this journey there are three important relationships that need to be developed and maintained.

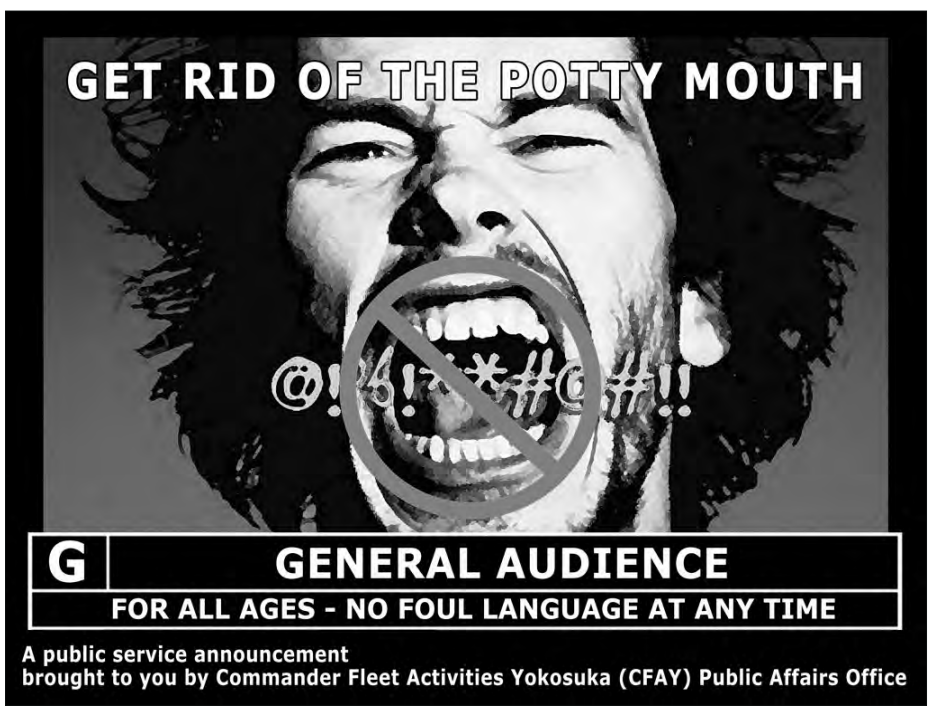
The three basic relationships in life are our relationship with God, our relationship with others, and our relationship with our selves.

How is my relationship with God? Am I using the tools of my religious tradition to cultivate a close and intimate relationship with a Higher Power?

How about my relationship with others—my family my shipmates, my friends, the people I don't like? Am I a peacemaker or am I making enemies?

How about my relationship with myself? Do I see myself as someone who is of value and worth? Am I kind to myself?

The Apostle Paul, in the Christian New Testament, wrote to the young man Timothy: "Physical training is of some value, but godliness [I would say "spiritual fitness"] has value for all things" (I Timothy 4:8). If you were given a Spiritual Fitness Test, would you pass?



Navy Memorial hosts 21st Blessing of the Fleet

From Defense Media Activity - Navy

WASHINGTON – The United States Navy Memorial hosted the 21st Annual Blessing of the Fleet ceremony at the memorial in Washington, D.C., April 14.

The ceremony followed the Washington, D.C., annual Cherry Blossom Festival Parade, and featured the United States Navy Band and Ceremonial Guard, along with a Parade of Attachés and presentation of colors advanced across the memorial's outdoor plaza as the event commenced.

President and CEO of the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation, retired Vice Adm. John Totushek, welcomed guests to the centuries-old tradition.

"We feel privileged to take part in this time-honored tradition that not only holds great meaning for our men and women of the Navy and Sea Services today, but also kicks off a full season of events here at the Navy Memorial that ensures their legacy will live on forever," said Totushek.

Retired Capt. C. Richard Duncan, CHC, offered a blessing to safeguard crews and ships from the danger of the seas, as a Sailor from the U.S. Navy's Ceremonial Guard proceeded across the memorial "Granite Sea" plaza to pour water from the Seven Seas and the Great Lakes into the surrounding fountains, "charging" them to life and ushering in the spring season.

Following the ceremony, culinary specialists from the White House Mess prepared and served Navy bean soup to guests in the Naval Heritage Center.

The Washington Revels Maritime Voices gave a musical performance in the Naval Heritage Center's Burke Theater.

Singing "Songs of the Sea and Shore," the musical group portrayed the old life at sea and back home, including the Sailors' use of sea chanteys and the joys and hardships of the women ashore.

Guests were also welcome to explore the memorial's newly-launched "Year of the Chief" exhibit, depicting chief life, work, history and accomplishments through historical artifacts, art and imagery.

The exhibit, which is on display through March 2013, is free and open to the public and will be accompanied by numerous public events throughout the year, including book signings, children's activities and ceremonies for active duty personnel and their families.

U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guardsman Nicholas Sookbir pours waters from the Seven Seas and Great Lakes into the U.S. Navy Memorial fountain during the Blessing of the Fleet ceremony April.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Amara R. Timberlake