Slinkies, acronyms, and a time for closeness

By Chaplain Aaron Kleinman

Editor's note: God's name is treated with unusual care in Jewish tradition and is never pronounced. Some Jews carry the practice even further by abstaining from writing the English word "God" and substituting the spelling with "G-d" or "Gd." Special thanks to Chaplain (Rabbi) Aaron Kleinman, who is visiting from Great Lakes, Ill., and provided this week's article.

Did you know that Judaism loves acronyms? The Hebrew month we are in now, the one just before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is called *Elul*. Many say the letters of the name, *Aleph, Lamed, Vuv and Lamed,* stand for the most famous verse of *Shir HaShirim*, the Song of Songs, "*Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li*, (I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine)." The song is an allegorical love poem between G-d and the Jewish people. The very name of this month hints to us that this is a time for drawing closer to G-d.

Jewish time is not like secular time. Every season, every month, every day of the year has an essence that connects to that same moment every year going back to the very beginning and going forward to the end of time. To picture this, simply take a slinky. Grasp a point at the last coil of a slinky, and grasp the point opposite it on the first coil. *S T R E T C H* out the slinky and the points seem very far away from one another. Compress the slinky and we see they are in fact quite close together. Rosh Hashanah marks the anniversary of the creation of humanity, when G-d kissed Adam and blew a piece of himself into the first man, bestowing upon him a soul. Yom Kippur marks the time when Moses, after a second 40 days on Mount Sinai, finally gained atonement for the Jewish people for the sin of the golden calf. No two people have ever been closer to G-d than Adam and Moses at those times. These days are marked for growing closer to G-d.

And that, my friends, is what this season is about: *Teshuvah*. While it is usually translated, "repentance," the word literally means, "return." Return to G-d. It is a time to look into ourselves, our relationships with other people, and our relationship with G-d, and see what is causing distance. Then we should acknowledge what we've done to create the distance, stop doing those things, and do what we can to repair the damage done. Over the years, many of us stray far from the path. Our journey back home is never shorter than now.

This year, Rosh Hashanah begins at sunset on Sept. 8 and runs until nightfall on Sept. 10. Yom Kippur begins at sunset on Sept. 17 and concludes at nightfall on Sept. 18. Every year, they run from the 1st, 2nd and 10th of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*.

Department of Defense joins alliance for suicide prevention

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Carden, American Forces Press Service

Editor's note: September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. In an effort to help raise awareness and provide information about suicide prevention efforts and resources available, CFAY Morale, Welfare and Recreation, USNH Yokosuka and Fleet and Family Support Center are sponsoring the Suicide Awareness Family 3K Run/Walk, which will be held at the George I. Purdy Fitness Center Sept. 22 beginning 5:30 p.m. Call 241-4486 for more information.

Taking care of service members is among Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates' top concerns, and that includes preventing military suicides.

"It is always a horrible tragedy to see a service member safely off the battlefield only to lose them to this scourge," Gates said. "It is the ongoing duty of this department to do everything possible to care for those who protect our nation."

Speaking at the launch of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Gates underscored the importance of a nationwide approach to suicide prevention. The alliance's strategy pools federal and private-sector research and resources in hopes of better addressing the national suicide rate.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius are part of the alliance and represent the public sector on the board. Army Secretary John M. McHugh represents the public sector as co-chair.

The military suicide rate has increased steadily over the past five years, exceeding the national average of 11.1 suicides per 100,000 people. The military last year averaged 12.5, according to a Defense Department task force.

Suicide claimed 309 military members last year, and 267 troops committed suicide in 2008, the task force said. From 2005 to 2009, more than 1,100 service members took their own lives, an average of one suicide every 36 hours, the task force said.

"We must and we will do better," Gates said.

Gates outlined some of the challenges the military faces in suicide prevention, citing nearly a decade of war and advancements in protection and battlefield medicine. While more troops are surviving physical injuries, psychological war wounds have taken a toll on the military, he explained.

The stigma associated with seeking help for post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries also is a challenge in suicide prevention, he said, noting that such conditions can increase the risk of suicide.

"We are also confronting a historical stigma attached to these kinds of wounds - a lack of understanding that they, too, are an inevitable consequence of combat, that those fighting to recover, deserve respect for their sacrifice, as well as the best state-of-the-art care," Gates said.

The Defense Department has taken several measures to reduce stress on the force and help troops and their families in need, he said.

Gates noted that the Army and Marine Corps are growing the size of their forces to increase time at home between deployments. Also, the Pentagon is working to improve access to care by adding more than 2,000 mental health providers at military health care facilities. Initiatives are also under way to improve care for reserve-component troops and their families, many of whom don't have the same access to support as active-duty troops.

According to Gates, the Pentagon's most notable - and perhaps most difficult - challenge is working to change the reluctance within the military culture to seek mental health care. Troops who seek psychological care are not at risk of damaging their careers. In fact, he added, he praises their willingness to come forward.

"As with almost every issue in our military, progress on this front comes down to leadership among those in command and leadership positions," he said. "They need to aggressively encourage those under them to seek help if needed, and also set an example by doing the same."

Tackling the military's suicide issue will translate to success in the civilian world, he added.

"In everything we do, we must remember that every soldier, Sailor, airman or Marine is part not just of the military, but also of a larger community," the secretary said. "Their families, their hometowns, their civilian employers, their places of worship all must be involved in the solution."