Independence Day

By Chaplain Douglas Vrieland

Today, the day this article is being published, is one of the most sacred days of the entire year. My desk calendar tells me that today is Good Friday, the day Christians remember the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on a cross outside of Jerusalem. The calendar also tells me that Passover begins at sundown. On this day those in the Jewish tradition remember the final night of slavery in Egypt, the night when the firstborn male in every Egyptian household was killed but the houses of the Israelites were "passed over" because the blood of the Passover Lamb was on the doorpost.

In both the Jewish and Christian traditions, this day is about being set free. Our Jewish friends refer to Passover as "The Festival of our Freedom."

It is a commemoration of their being set free from bondage to the Egyptians. For Christians, the emphasis falls on being set free from the power of sin and evil in our lives. The common element here is being set free. We might say that today, rather than July 4, is Independence Day.

But how free are we? According to the story of the Exodus, once the Israelites were set free from the Pharaoh and began their journey to the Promised Land, they began to grumble and complain, and longed to return to their former life in Egypt. "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt!

There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." (Exodus 16:3).

In the Christian scripture the Apostle Paul writes, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

The Apostle goes on and tells us that the secret to freedom is in loving service. "You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge in the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love" (vs. 13).

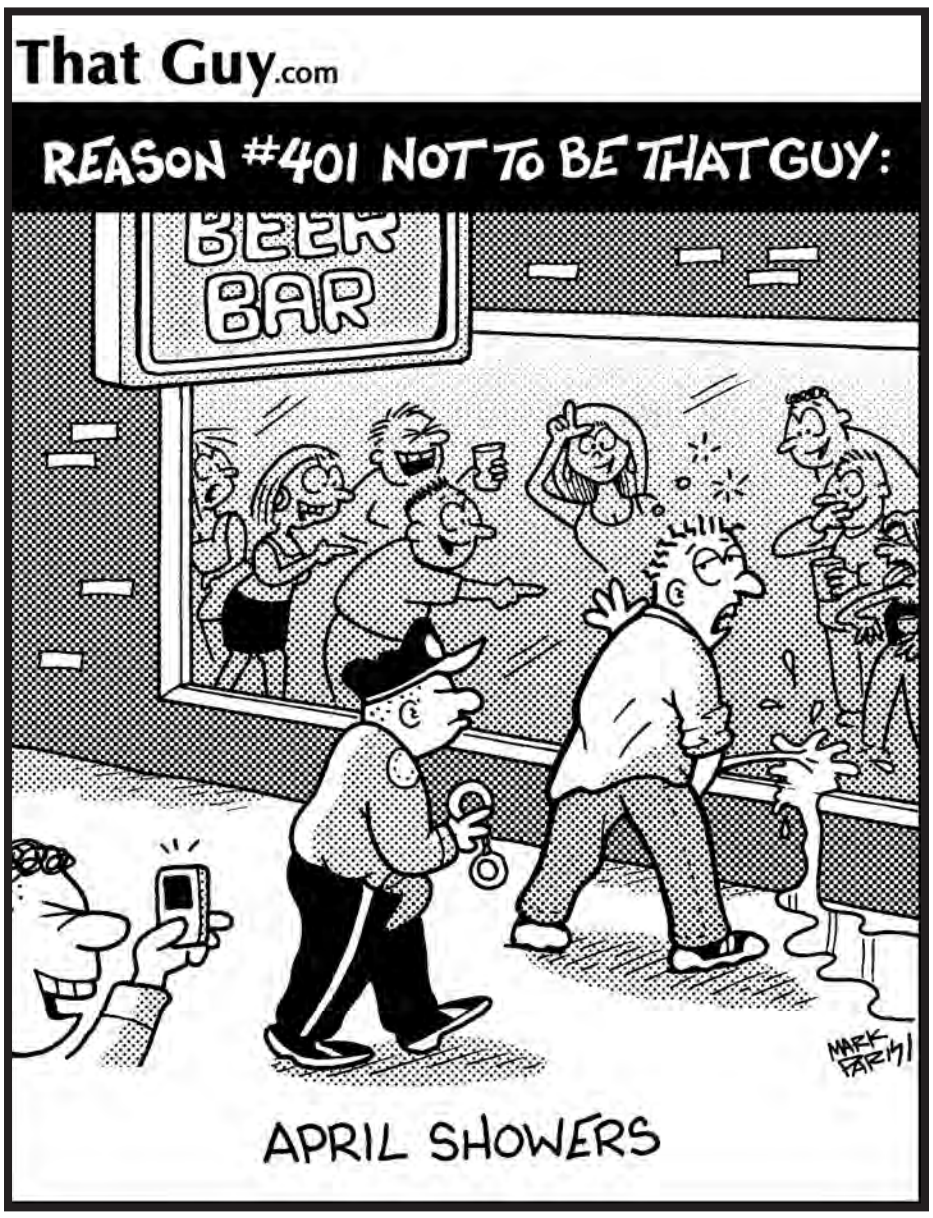
Both these great religions teach us the same spiritual truth: that a life lived for oneself is a life of bondage. When the fulfillment of my personal desires becomes the organizing principle of my life, I am no longer free.

Addicts discover that the life lived in pursuit of the "high" the addictive substance brings renders them powerless, that their life "has become unmanageable". The bumper sticker gives voice to the bondage that can come with the pursuit of personal material happiness and prosperity: "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go."

`In his book, The Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster writes about the "terrible burden of always needing to get our own way." My ego is a harsh task master. It is never satisfied.

Freedom comes when I lay aside my own desires and focus instead on serving others. When my obsession is not on what I'm going to get, but what I can give. When my biggest concern is on how I can meet the needs of those I love rather than how I can use them to get my own needs met. Loving service brings with it a deep and lasting joy and satisfaction. In that joy and satisfaction we find freedom.

Have you been set free?



#SAAM: Navy announces Sexual Assault Awareness Month

From Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

WASHINGTON – The Navy announced Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) and issued guidance to focus efforts on awareness and prevention of sexual violence through the use of special events and command-level education in NAVADMIN (Navy Administrative Message) 106/12, released March 28.

The Department of Defense's SAAM theme this year is, "Hurts One, Affects All. Prevention of Sexual Assault is Everyone's Duty."

In addition to this overarching theme, the Navy will highlight complementary weekly themes throughout the month.

"Sexual assault prevention is one key aspect of the Navy's 21st Century Sailor and Marine initiative to increase the personal readiness of each and every Sailor within our Navy," said Vice Adm. Scott R. Van Buskirk, chief of naval personnel and director of the Navy's SAAM 2012 initiative. "The weekly themes will underscore varying aspects of sexual assault and the Navy's efforts to raise awareness in order to eliminate this crime."

The four weekly themes are: "Hurts One," "Affects All," "Prevention is Everyone's Duty," and "We Will Not Tolerate Sexual Assault."

"Our goal is to foster a command climate in which reporting assault is embraced and encouraged while providing support to victims," said Van Buskirk. "We are also demanding a strict zero tolerance policy for sexual assault and accountability of all offenders."

Commands will host mandatory education sessions to raise sexual assault awareness among Sailors.

Commanding officers can either hold a single two-hour stand down or break the discussions into four 30-minute weekly sessions, according to the message.

Scripts and videos for each week's theme will be provided to commanding officers to help facilitate discussion throughout their commands.

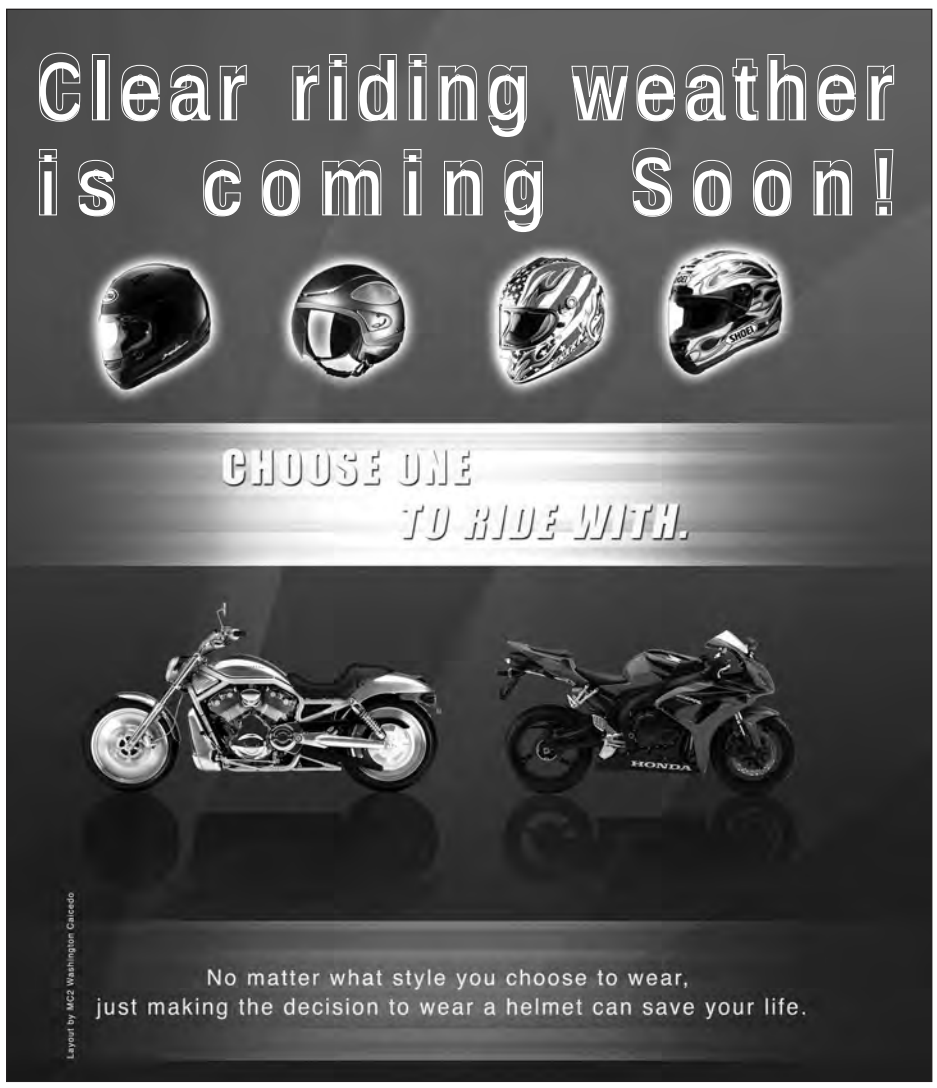
These engagement products, in addition to talking points, posters and other tools, will be posted to the Navy Personnel Command's Sexual Assault and Prevention website, http://www.sapr.navy.mil, according to the NAVADMIN.

Navy installations and commands around the world will be organizing activities to raise awareness of sexual assault throughout the month.

All units are encouraged to participate and promote SAAM events in addition to the two-hour stand down in April, said Van Buskirk.

"Collectively, we can make a difference in preventing sexual assault by engaging all of our people in a meaningful manner to raise awareness to change behavior," said Van Buskirk.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response is an important element of the readiness area of the 21st Century Sailor and Marine initiative which consolidates a set of objectives and policies, new and existing, to maximize Sailor and Marine personal readiness, build resiliency and hone the most combat-effective force in the history of the Department.

The Department of the Navy (DoN) is working to aggressively to prevent sexual assaults, to support sexual assault victims, and to hold offenders accountable.

Help raise awareness by joining the conversation on social media using #SAAM.