Planet of lonely bipeds

By Chaplain Norbert Karava

Certainly one of the oddities of man, the species that has come to master the planet, is that while on the one hand capable of such incomparable domination because of his rationality, physically he is among the most weak and fragile animals. Up to recently, a case of mere diarrhea and a fever were enough jeopardize our physical existence. In large part because of this, one of our main foci, as is evident in our health industry-driven commercials and our obsessions, has been and is our physical health and well-being.

Yoga, vitamins, minerals, herbs, acupuncture, to mention but a very few, Americans spent 34 billion dollars on alternative medicine, according to research conducted in 2007 by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the same year, and in the never-ending quest for the elusive fountain of youth, Americans spent nearly 15 billion dollars on supplements alone, a mere third of their out-of-pocket expenses for prescription drugs and medications. That's an awful lot of snake oil.

A visitor from another planet might wonder at the apparent silliness of a species that spends nearly 61 billion dollars on diet plans and supplements annually, trying to tame its morbid obesity, while spending over 300 billion on its "MacDoom" fast foods. For those who know what existential sanity smells like, all this reeks with two unmistakable odors: obsession and fear.

The danger that accompanies our physical fragility, as becomes clearer when we actually become truly ill is not that we find ourselves in the pain locker and face the prospect of our inevitable death, as frightening as those realities are.

As we confront our mortality, courtesy of either the ravages of old age or the opportunistic encroachments of some invasive pathology, it is very difficult not to become self-centered and focused on our own state of affairs and thus lose personal connection, or in a more sublime language, "personal communion." This is especially the case if our sojourn in the valley of the darkness of death is prolonged and chronic; more and more, the persons around us have significance only insofar as they have some bearing on the problem about which we cannot stop thinking, obsessing and worrying, which makes love for them on our part less and less possible.

And here, there is an anthropological conviction: Human beings are so constituted that two things happen to them when the agenda of life is other than the active and passive love than obtains in personal relationships:

With the extinction of love, our relationship to things as the object of our desires changes. Our desires for things, usually under the rubric of pleasure, are less subject to that faculty of the will, known as "freedom of choice." The appetites of our sensual desires become ever more autonomous and take place as on-going processes outside the domain of the will.

In other words, if the business of the will is not love, the business of life becomes addiction and obsession.

Addiction and obsession are what happens to us when love fails or rather when we fail to love. The oracle of truth in this regard, that which manifests our collective existential insanity, I opine, is our use of the internet: Under the guise of a relative anonymity, it has become the veritable playground of our addictions and obsessions, the virtual incarnation of lonely planet, populated by very, very lonely bipeds.

The second is fear. I argue that, for human beings, there are ultimately two possible motives or drivers: love or fear. Actually, it could be argued that there is only one possible motive for a human being, namely love, and that fear exists only as a lack of love, and is expressed as activity taking place in a vacuum of motive.

Yet, fear is so dramatic in its outward manifestations and its power is so compelling that we can speak of it as a motive.

Without love, which is able to take us to a point beyond ourselves in an act of personal communion, we were left with ourselves, and, here is another anthropological assertion: Human beings, taken individually and left to themselves, by their constitution, are innately incomplete. If this be true, unless human beings are together with others in on-going love, they are left to their inherently insecure selves, in other words, their fear. And fear admits of an unlimited number of packages; there is no end of the different kinds of worry and anxiety we are capable of, all of which are reducible to fear.

And so, the if-then conclusion is: If no love in personal communion, then obsession, addiction and fear. If no love in personal communion, then whatever the business of life might be, agriculture or accounting, not only will there be no joy in these things, but they will be the subject matter of open-ended worry and anxiety.

Without love, the pleasures of life, be they peach cobbler or piña coladas, become the all too temporary fixes for ever deepening addictions, which in turn warp our thinking into the nightmares of unending obsession.

As per the Dalai Lama: "Man. He sacrifices his health to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present. The result is that he does not live in the present or the future. He lives as if he is never going to die and then dies having never really lived."

For those who are in love, it is not that health, beauty and well being are not desirable, but they have the most compelling clarity that in themselves they are useless, or rather, worse than useless.

Indeed those who are in love are willing to part ways with everything for the sake of love, not because they are someone stronger or braver, but simply because they are in love, and this makes them not only free but capable of joy.

AIU Insurance Company, USO Pacific support service members, families

From USO Public Affairs

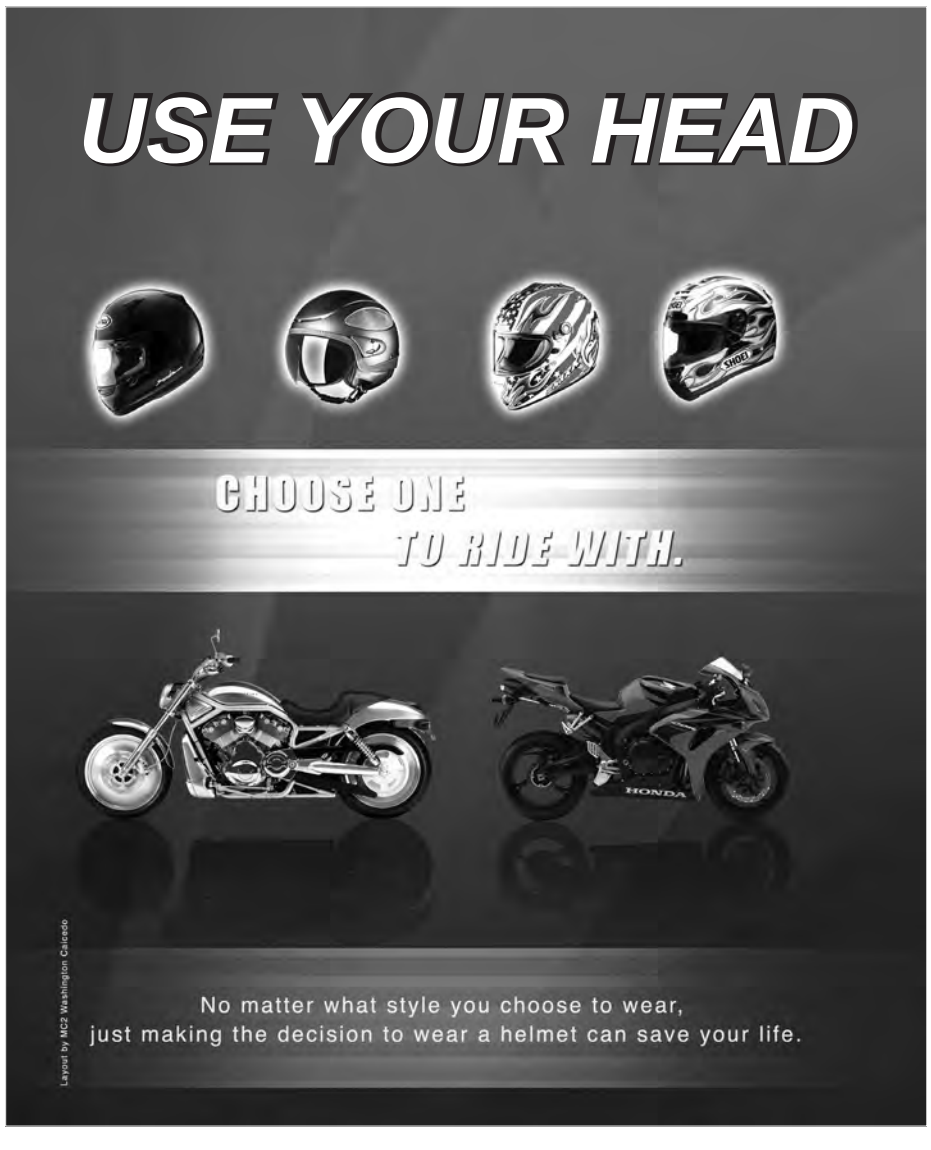
Okinawa, Japan - AIU Insurance Company (AIU) has joined forces with the USO to support American troops and their families stationed in the Pacific. Through the partnership AIU will donate funds to support programs and services offered at USO centers throughout mainland Japan and the island of Okinawa. The USO has over 71 years of history delivering innovative programs, critical services and entertainment events that lift the spirits of American troops and their families. With more than 160 locations worldwide, 8 of which are located in mainland Japan and Okinawa, the USO touches America's military and their families millions of times each year.

AIU's generous donation will be used for center "Deployment and Welcome Home Barbeques" in Japan and Okinawa and to provide Deployment Kits containing comfort items and toiletries for troops. It will also support the renovation of the USO Kadena Social Hall, the USO Japan Service Salute Gala and the USO Sasebo Golf Tournament.

USO Pacific will receive the donation at a check presentation celebration held at the USO Kadena Community Social Hall on Monday, July 9, 2012. Staff from USO Pacific Region will join AIU representatives for a ceremonial check presentation and enjoy a karate demonstration by Shorin Rye Karate, a group that regularly meets in the USO Kadena Social Hall. Col Roftiel Constantine, Commander, 18th Mission Support Group and Carly Harris, USO Pacific Regional Vice President will be on hand to help thank AIU representatives Frank O'Neill, Executive Vice President for Consumer Business and Steve Grapperhaus, U.S. Forces Japan and Expatriate Business Manager for their generous donation to USO Pacific.

"As a not-for-profit organization, the USO depends on the donations of companies like AIU Insurance Company to help us execute our mission of lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families. We are grateful for their generosity and support," said Carly Harris, USO Pacific Regional Vice President.

The USO (United Service Organizations) lifts the spirits of America's troops and their families millions of times each year at hundreds of places worldwide. We provide a touch of home through centers at airports and military bases in the U.S. and abroad, top quality entertainment and innovative programs and services. We also provide critical support to those who need us most, including forward-deployed troops, military families, wounded warriors and their families and the families of the fallen.

The USO is a private, nonprofit organization, not a government agency. All of our programs and services are made possible by the American people, support of our corporate partners and the dedication of our volunteers and staff.

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