Poison in the well of the soul

By Chaplain Norbert Karava

Looking at the troubled life that seems to obtain for so many of us hapless denizens of first world societies, it seems difficult to believe that joy would be the natural state of the human heart. It seems, that in the understanding of many, joy is something that must be aspired to, sought after, pursued, achieved, won, perhaps even earned, something on the order of a reward or payment. In this school of thought, joy is the halo effect shimmering over our paychecks, our trophies, promotions and awards.

Those who actually live among third world peoples, as opposed to merely concerned first world visiting tourists, often make this discovery: That joy actually is the natural state of the human heart. Just as human bodies are naturally at the temperature of 98.6 F, human hearts are naturally in the state of joy – that is, unless something precludes this state of being. And so, we discover that in its root meaning, joy is not something that can be achieved, or, all the less, manufactured, but something that happens to us. Often those who make this discovery are brought to their knees by yet another, following in its wake: That they have wasted years of toil trying to cleverly clone the naturally occurring joy that first took place when as children they were charmed by a cardboard box at the foot of the staircase. There is no switch to turn for joy. And unlike the obscenely selfish well-being marketed in morning fitness shows and commercials featuring electric ab twitchers, the state of joy is beyond the realm of human control.

Returning to our comparatively less-joyful first-world patterns of life, if "joyless" be too extreme a description, we can begin to discern what prevents joy from taking place in the heart. All joy-killers can be reduced, I think, to two headings: fear and anger. Our purpose here is to briefly consider how anger incapacitates the heart's ability to know joy.

If you reflect on your own experience of anger you will see that in the state of anger, it is impossible to either rejoice, be grateful, or, most importantly, love. The state of anger simply and absolutely precludes any of these; it is either one or the other. We often experience a pendulum effect from anger to love and back again. But this much is clear: For love to begin, anger must end. When we consider what makes joy, gratitude and love possible, we begin to understand the dimensions of anger.

These are the responses of the human person to goodness. Goodness acts upon us in a wonderful way and enables us to respond in the mode of gratitude, joy or love. We might even say that the experience of goodness brings our very hearts into being. It is important to understand that we cannot self-initiate the experience of goodness, and therefore put ourselves in any of these wonderful states, but that these states are inherently responsive to goodness from outside of and beyond ourselves, acting upon us. We must be moved by a kindness from without.

As a purely emotional response to an evil sustained, anger is a natural mechanism allowing us to overcome threats in our environment that require confrontation. Hence, anger, in itself, is certainly not evil. The danger of anger is that it prevents us from being acted upon by goodness. Anger precludes the experience of the graciousness from the world outside. In anger, we are so driven by urgent internal agenda that we are closed to external goodness. Being angrily closed to external goodness, personal or otherwise, the only external points of focus we have are targets, and not realities. On a related note, when we entertain reality we allow a thing to manifest itself to our minds in terms of itself and not in terms of what we need it to be or how it serves our purposes. It is precisely this sort of openness that we lose in a moment of anger.

Anger, like fear, can become chronic. After the merely emotional eruption of anger, which we suffer or undergo, we can choose to be angry. When that happens, anger becomes a thing not of mere emotion but of will and thus enters the deepest realm of soul. When anger becomes a thing of the will, and thus chronic, it defines our moral nature. If this continues long, we cross over to a sort of "dark side:" This means that having so completely chosen to be angry, we cannot really choose to be not angry, and anger becomes a permanent attachment-debilitation of the will. We know chronic anger as resentment, and if we allow anger to define our moral natures we become resentful-angry people.

If this happens, our resentment is endless. Even if the present object of our resentment goes way, we will inevitably find another target of our resentment because we have lost the ability to choose to be not angry. We simply will not be able to live without an adversarial relationship and a target of our resentment. We all know what happens when inherently resentful people who thrive on conflict assume positions of authority and leadership; life around them begins to resemble one of Dante's circles of Hell in which the damned are eternally biting each others body parts off. And if you aspire to a position of leadership or you foresee that leadership is coming your way, this is precisely the sort of man you cannot be, no matter how stellar your military IQ is or how thick your resume. On the other hand, as a leader, you must be able to recognize chronically angry or resentful people and prudently make the best decisions to prevent the unquenchable fire of resentment from spreading to your crew.

Chronic anger closes us to goodness, including the highest order of goodness, the gracious and incomparable goodness of God. What happens to a soul that, rendered impervious to goodness by resentment, lives without joy, gratitude or love for years, or even a lifetime? Does it not become an empty, anonymous shell, driven by mere desire: Flee pain here, pursue pleasure there? Ah, but beyond that, is it not bitterly alone and alone in its bitterness?

Chronic anger or resentment has a terminal phase: After having fought all our battles and having been exiled to some obscure corner of the nursing home, and we no longer have anyone left to be angry with, whose fault will it be that life just simply didn't meet our expectations? That, instead of grateful for life, we feel cheated? Why? God of course! He's the one behind it all! God's the one to blame! And then, we have a whole eternity to resent God. Thus you see one of the many possible paths to suicide in the dark woods of the heart. We are well advised to flee our angry selves, and accept the humble pang of relinquishing our anger, lest it become the poison of resentment poured into the well of the soul.

***PINNING** cont. from page 1*

Newly-frocked Navy Chief Counselor (SW) Antonia Brown, a command career counselor from CFAY, had her anchors pinned on by her husband, U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Nick Brown, from the 374th Operation Support Squadron, Yokota Air Base, and her eldest daughter, Sophia.

"The feeling is indescribable," said Antonia. "It's something that a lot of Sailors have dreamed about for a long time that I dreamed about for a long time. The day has finally come."

Nick said that this ceremony was something that he's been waiting for along time. "To actually see the pinning ceremony, to see the Navy heritage and the history behind the ceremony, and actually put her anchors on, it was beyond words."

The Browns both said that (chief's induction and pinning) this is something that they've discussed for a long time. "So when it finally happened, the majority of it he already knew. He's been with me every step of the way," Antonia said.

Chief Operations Specialist (SW/AW) Andrew Steiner, from Commander, Naval Forces Japan, has been in the Navy just under seven years and made chief on his first try. Steiner thanked the mess, those he's worked for and those that he worked in the past for their support.

"It's a great feeling, almost beyond words. Getting pinned, getting covered today is a great honor."

Near the conclusion of the ceremony, seven master chiefs (from various CFAY commands) read, to the newly-frocked chiefs from the CPO Creed telling them, "Your entire way of life has now been changed. More will be expected of you; more will be demanded of you. Not because you are an E-7, but because you are now a Chief Petty Officer. You have not merely been promoted one pay grade. You have joined an exclusive fraternity - and, as in all fraternities, you have a responsibility to your brothers - even as they have a responsibility to you."

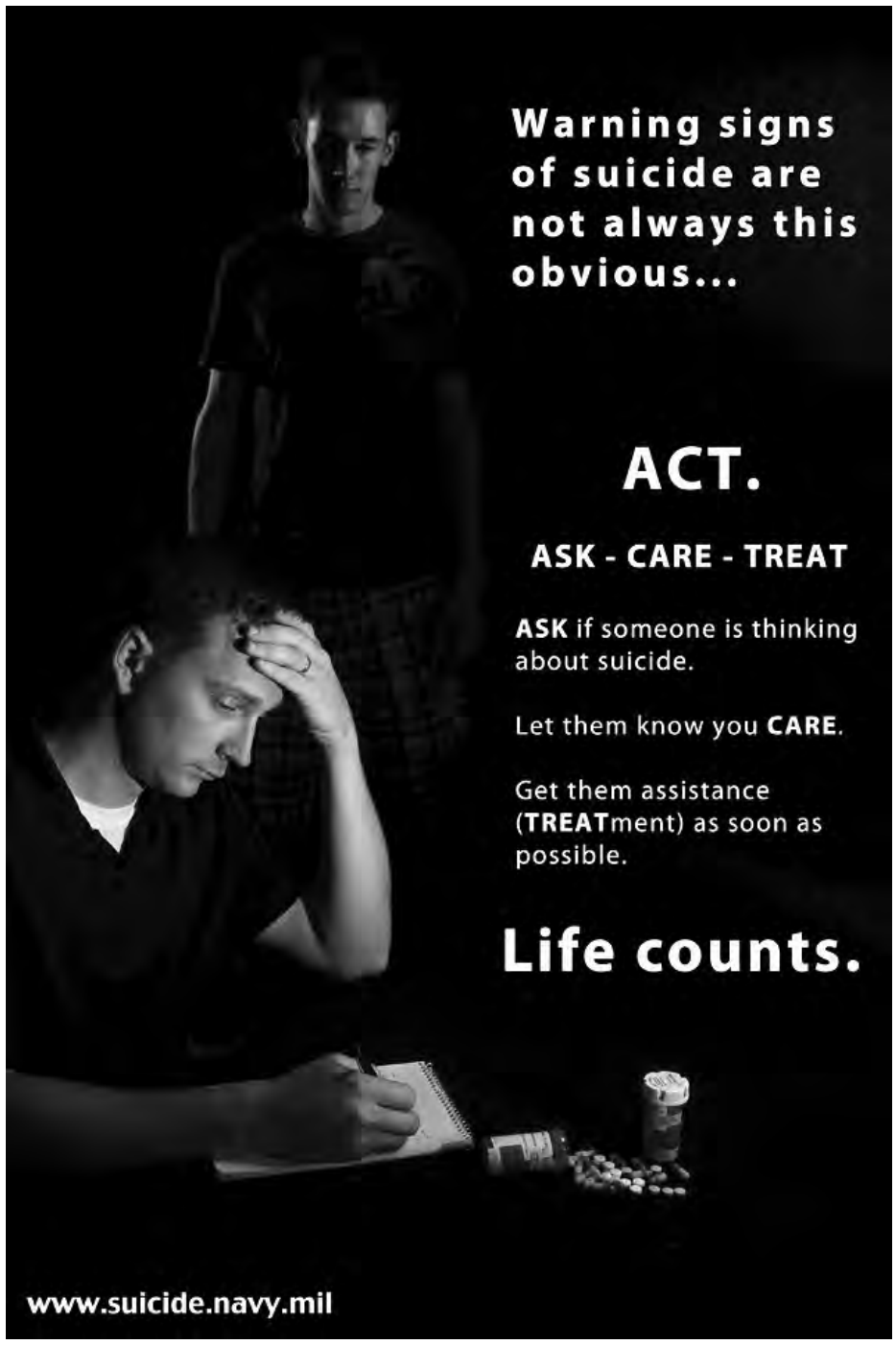
Kinnick Sports

FOOTBALL:

• Sept. 21 Vs. Zama High School. The junior varsity (JV) game starts at 4:30 p.m.; The varsity game starts at 7 p.m.

VOLLEYBALL:

• Sept. 25 at 5:30 p.m. Vs. International School of the Sacred Heart

• Sept. 28 at 5 p.m. Vs. Edgren HS- JV. The varsity game starts at 6:30 p.m. (or 30 min after JV game ends)

• Sept. 29 at 10:30 a.m. Vs. Edgren HS- JV. The varsity starts at noon (or 30 min after JV game ends). There will be a JV/varsity swing game at 1:30 p.m.