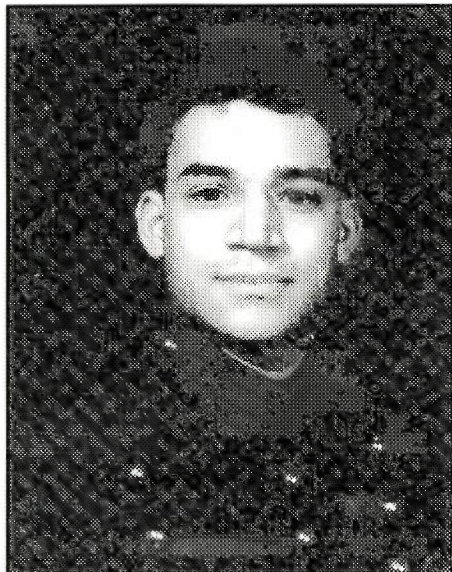


WHAT BEING JEWISH MEANS TO ME



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United States Military Academy
Class of 1996

At West Point, tradition and history define who I am. In peacetime they demand that I serve my country and its ideals. In time of war, they exact a terrible price. Knowing and sharing this tradition and history with cadets and soldiers strengthens the ties between us. They have also made me more aware of my Jewishness.

At the Sabbath eve services in the Academy Chapel, sitting with Jewish veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, I have gained an appreciation of the Jewish tradition of service to this country. There is the former Polish sergeant who escaped the Nazis and joined the American army to fight in the European theater. Next to him is the soldier who, in 1945, fought with a unit that liberated concentration camp inmates, among them his future wife. As an American, I am proud that our U.S. armed forces played such a leading role in the defeat of Nazism and in defense of freedom in the postwar era.

On some Friday nights, I reflect on Joshua and the warriors of the tribes of Israel encircling the walls of ancient Jericho. I remember the bravery of the youthful David overcoming the might of Goliath, and of the Maccabees fighting history's first recorded struggle for religious freedom. And I think about modern-day Israelis who, since the birth of Israel in 1948, have had to fight for survival and security. On those Sabbath eves in the Academy Chapel, past and present merge.

What appealed to me about a military career? In Hebrew school I learned that *shalom*, peace, is one of the highest Jewish values. At West Point, we study the art of warfare, but our military aim is to seek and ensure peace. I may have to lead others into battle, but ultimately, like my colleagues, I yearn for a world in which soldiers and armies become obsolete. Was it not the prophet Isaiah who spoke about beating "swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks"? And each week in the Chapel we sing the words of the prayer "*Oseh shalom...May the One who creates harmony above make peace for us, for Israel, and for all who dwell on earth.*" My Jewish tradition teaches me to be strong and, at the same time, to seek a world without war, a world in which "the lion will lie down with the lamb."

I am heir to two great traditions — Jewish and American — which, in my view, stand for the same basic principles: the building of a more just and equitable society; the importance of caring and compassion; the defense of liberty. That's why Jews have had a love affair with America. And that's why I'm proud to be an American Jew and to serve my country.



The American Jewish Committee

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The American Jewish Committee is pleased to present this message, the sixteenth in a series, on the meaning of being Jewish today.

Founded in 1906, the American Jewish Committee is dedicated to strengthening the Jewish community, enriching the quality of Jewish life, and enhancing democratic values for all.

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