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## Shalom To You!

By Chaplain Mitchell Schranz

This will be my last e-mail to you from Iraq. My tour of duty here is coming to a close. It has been an unforgettable year, to say the least. With all the hardship of being here, without doubt the most meaningful part of this experience was our Jewish Chapel & all the people associated with it. Shabbat services were always a highlight of the week--something to look forward to. The services and Shabbat dinners afterwards were fun for me, and hopefully for you too. Many Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines & Civilians came and went, but each one left an indelible imprint on us. As a small community we were more than just a random group of personnel who happened to go to the same service; we were family in every sense.

We will always remember our people who were killed and wounded in action. We particularly remember SGT Howard P. Allen, A1C Elizabeth Jacobson, and SPC Binyamin ben Yehudah who fell in battle in the course of the past year. May G-d comfort their families among the mourners for Zion and Jerusalem.

Each of you is a hero, making huge sacrifices to fight for our Nation and peace in the world...The world and our Nation would be a lot less safe without you doing what you do every day. Another reason your service is a great Mitzvah is because, unfortunately, after every conflict in US history, anti-Semites would level the same lie--that Jews did not serve in the military. Each of us is an answer to such vicious slander--we were here, we served, we got the t-shirt!

For all of those reading this who have supported us from the home front, please accept my deepest gratitude. The packages of goodies, notes, holiday outreach, etc., mean more to us that you can imagine. I also want to thank my wife and family for their unfailing support. They have put up with a lot and I am grateful for their good spirit in dealing with it.

Finally, a little story...when I reported to Fort Bliss, Texas, a year ago for training, one of our Army instructors was a body-builder and a Special Forces, Airborne Ranger type. He taught us combat survival skills. I asked him about his tour in Iraq, and he told me he was not ever deployed here; he thought about going but felt he was too old at age 47. I am a bit older than that, and thought to myself, if he cannot do it at 47, I am really s----ed!

Many people have asked me why I volunteered to come here, especially at my "young" age. The answer is simple, I knew there were Jewish military personnel in Iraq, and there was only one Rabbi in theater at that time. There was no choice but to come and take care of my fellow Yidden. It's like our Avos Avosanu (forefathers) were calling me here, and I knew if I did not answer their call, I'd feel like a heel the rest of my life. I desire neither medals nor honors for fulfilling, to the best of my limited abilities, what was a sacred responsibility.

So, as Shakespeare put it, "what's done is done." I can now return to my family and retire in peace.

Well, that's about it for the moment. Thanks for the memories!

God bless and stay great!

Shalom, Rabbi Mitch Schranz

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## Excerpts from a Speech for USNA Jewish Midshipmen Baccalaureate Service Commodore Uriah P. Levy Chapel, 21 May 2006

By Captain Paul Becker

I've now prayed here at USNA across four decades, beginning with prayers for my plebe summer to end quickly in 1979, and now for your successes in 2006 because the nation needs you in our war on terror.

Talmud quote number one: a Jew, no matter how far he strays from the path, is still a Jew. It's not for me to tell you what should be your Jewish path or how far you should stray...your path is your choice, it's influenced by your parents, your family, your friends, your rabbis and your core values. Your path is a factor of many, many things...how many times you attend temple, how you keep kosher, how helpful you are to others, how many pieces of Judaica you keep in your home, how well you know Torah, and so on ...there's no right answer, there's no objective standard of what "the path" should be...but you need to be comfortable with your Jewish path whatever you determine that path to be. In some of my family members' opinions, I strayed too far from what they thought my religious path should be by even entering the Navy instead of entering medical school; they thought I strayed too far from what they thought my religious path should be by going to an organization where I had zero chance of keeping kosher and regularly congregating with family and Jewish friends...that's their opinion, but I was, and I am comfortable with the religious path I chose. To some I strayed by marrying the love of my life, my Christian wife Kim whom I couldn't bear to be without...but that's their opinion and I am comfortable with the path I chose... Some think I stray too much when I attended Christmas midnight mass in the Vatican, or attended a Billy Graham event, or visited Islam's largest mosque in Casablanca, but I'm comfortable with my religious path and I encourage you to feel at ease with your path as well.

But here's where I don't stray from my religious path as an American naval officer who is Jewish ... I don't stray during the big holidays when junior Jewish personnel turn to a Jewish officer for ritual leadership, and I don't stray from my own beliefs which are part of my spiritual self. When you are at sea, or in a distant land, and you are the senior member of the tribe...don't stray so far from the path of our religion and avoid using the chain of command to find out how to get a Jewish chaplain to join you or how to get yourself to a Jewish community nearby to share our common heritage. There's a reason our people have survived for millennia across tragedy and triumph...a common heritage and a common faith...you must always keep the knowledge of where to find that religious path with you, even if you stray from it occasionally. Even if you're physically far removed from where you know Judaism is practiced in established synagogues with street addresses that are easy to reach or with phone numbers that are easy to call, you'll be amazed how enlightening the experience can be when you join a minyan or thriving congregation on an aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea, in Saudi Arabia, in France, in Italy, in Australia, or in the most incredibly different land I've ever encountered ... zip code 02138, Cambridge, Massachusetts, home of Harvard University, which is too insane to describe here, but a diamond in the rough up there is Harvard Hillel where I had some of the most fulfilling shabbat evenings of worship in my life

I am an American naval officer who is Jewish. You can be all three at once. Commodore Levy was ... and Rabbi Irv uses Levy's citation in his email footers ... "I am an American, a sailor, a Jew." There have been tens of thousands of Americans, sailors, Jews across our nation's history ... you can be all three at once. My foundations in Jewish traditions have made me a better sailor, or more accurately, a better naval officer. How?

- Maimonides' eight degrees of tzedakah or charity = good officership. We read of the eight degrees every Passover, but the lesson is eternal ... the levels of charity from lowest to highest are 1) giving unwillingly, 2) giving gladly, 3) giving gladly but only after being asked, 4) giving but not knowing who receives, 5) giving but not having the recipient know who gave, 6) giving anonymously to an anonymous recipient, and 7) giving something that strengthens someone's hand so they don't have to receive again. Think about that as a division officer...think about the difference between #8, helping a sailor unwillingly and #1, helping him gladly so that he may help himself in the long run. The best officers apply Maimonides' first degree of charity.

- Hillel: "What is hateful to yourself, do not do unto your neighbor. That is the whole of the Torah, the rest is commentary." Think about that as a division officer. Treat your shipmates as you would want yourself treated. It's the golden rule. That's the whole of the Torah ... and it's good officership.

- Here's one that's not uniquely Jewish, but it is Old Testament, and I know of it through occasional Bible study ... Isaiah 6:8 "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Here I am lord, send me." In his day, ol' Isaiah was in a kingdom which was in such a state of disrepair that it called for immediate action...the lord sought a man of action, and Isaiah volunteered. Isaiah knew his Jewish path. Think about that as a division officer. I guarantee you that you'll find yourself in situations that are such a sack of crabs that you can't stand it and it's driving you and your shipmates crazy...don't just complain about it...be a mensch, be a man of action and do something about it...Isaiah did, so can you.

- Repentance: confessing to God for a Jew can be accomplished at any time of the year with a direct line from you to the boss...it is of course paramount during the high holy days when you not only acknowledge the transgression, you must be sincere in regretting and rectifying the misdeed, and be determined not to repeat it. Only then will true atonement be obtained. Think about that as a division officer when you make your own mistakes, and you will...or when your sailors make mistakes and you need to help them back onto the right path.

A final couple o' thoughts: In the military it's important to get along, to be one of the guys. Many of the guys you'll meet on ships will never have met a Jew. Some won't like you. On those occasions I try twice as hard to be a regular guy in an attempt to disavow any erroneous stereotypes they have about Jews joining sports teams, taking on collateral duties, missing a little sleep if it means some extra social events. As a lone Jew in some commands you may be forced to play a broader role than you might choose otherwise, becoming a representative of a group of which you're a part, representing that group even if you think you're not worthy of representing us. But you are worthy...you wouldn't be graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy if you weren't worthy...so represent yourself, and represent our heritage well.

So set your Jewish path – high or low, right or left, active or passive--but set it, and stick with it, be true to it, and be comfortable with it. Be true to this path in dealing with others...you will know when you're on the path...you will know when you stray from the path...and the knowledge and application of your Jewish traditions will help you know how to get back on the path...and that is good Jewish character...and that will make you a better officer.

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# Guarding Against Identity Theft

SOURCE: Department of Veterans Affairs

As you know, there has been a major theft of data containing personal information on 26.5 million veterans, which may result in fraud and identity theft for those whose data has been compromised. The VA has provided the following information for veterans to safeguard their credit in light of this theft. In addition to the steps below, please also know that you can contact any of the credit agencies listed here to ensure that no one can use your social security number to open any account without contacting you first.

Be vigilant. Carefully monitor bank and credit card statements. Report unusual activity immediately to the financial institution involved and contact the Federal Trade Commission.

If you detect suspicious or unusual activity, do the following:

1. Contact the fraud department of one of the three major credit bureaus:
  1. Equifax: 800-525-6285; <http://www.equifax.com> ; P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, Ga. 30374-0241
  2. Experian: 888-EXPERIAN (397-3742); <http://www.experian.com> ; P.O. Box 9532, Allen, Tex. 75013
  3. TransUnion: 800-680-7289; <http://www.transunion.com> ; Fraud Victim Assistance Division, P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, Calif. 92834-6790
2. Close any accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.
3. File a report with your local police department or the police department in the area where the identity theft took place.
4. File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission by using its identity theft hotline at 877-438-4338, online at <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft> or by mail at Identity Theft Clearinghouse, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20580.

For more information, visit the Department of Veterans Affairs' special Web site, <http://www.firstgov.gov/veteransinfo> or call 800-FED-INFO (333-4636).