

7.7.2023

Throughout my life, my father has taught me countless things. He taught me how to properly throw a baseball. He taught me how to work story problems – you know, the ones involving trains, stations, and speed. He taught me that New York City really is one of the greatest places in the world.

But some of the most important things he taught me are connected with today, Armed Forces Shabbat. My father is a retired brigadier general. He served in the Air Force, retired, and somewhat unusually earned his star in the Nebraska Air National Guard. Through his service to our country, he taught me to stand respectfully through the entire national anthem, and to not move or speak until our nation's flag has been retired. He taught me – although only limitedly in comparison to some – about sacrifice when he missed weekend activities due to guard duty. He taught me about international diplomacy when he traveled to places like Turkey and Israel to work with associated air force units on behalf of the United States.

But the key and enduring lesson that my father taught me was one that resonates with many service people regardless of branch of service: "If you take care of the people, the people will take care of you." This tenant, rephrased in various ways, is central to many of today's most popular leadership philosophies.

Respect. Sacrifice. Peace. Leadership. Service. These are some of the greatest lessons I got from my front row seat in my military family. I'm sure I could fill the page with countless other attributes our armed forces afford us. I could fill another page with parallel elements that their families, loved ones and friends provide. And on either list, we could readily say dayanu. Yet every day, the country – and this world – ask for more.

Under Temple's dome this evening, we have dedicated this service to the people who take care of us. While we cannot provide your gear, arrange your work assignments, or simplify your path, we can honor you and those connected with your service. We therefore express our gratitude, appreciation, and even awe at your having chosen to take care your nation's people. Thank you, most sincerely, for your commitment, your sacrifice, and your love of country.