



February 1, 2018

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

There's an old joke that goes like this:

Two kids are sitting in a high school auditorium, listening to the principal give the welcoming speech for the year. The principal says, "The two greatest dangers our society faces are ignorance and indifference."

One of the students turns to his friend and asks, "Dude, what's 'ignorance and indifference?'"

The other student, bored and restless and wanting for the speech to end says, "I don't know and I don't care."

My last article in the January 1st bulletin, addressing President Trump's official recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel generated a gamut of reactions and comments among various members of Hillcrest Jewish Center. In the days immediately following the first day of the secular year, congregants wrote to me to share their agreement with the content of my article – *"Yishar Koach! I couldn't agree more with you, Rabbi Kogan"* – and also to criticize my position on the subject – *"Rabbi, the President appears to his base to be accomplishing something, when in reality he has done nothing but harm the chances for peace."*

By now, I have learned not only that it is impossible to please 100% of my congregants (I already gave up on that hope many years ago) but also that our congregation is diverse enough to include caring and devoted members whose views encompass the wide range of political possibilities.

For once, I must say that I am happy that people read the bulletin (including my article) and that they care enough to write me a note or an email. Most of the Hillcrest Jewish Center congregants not only have an opinion on the subject, but they are also well read. As in the joke above, the worst reaction to an opinion, article, sermon, or presentation, is not fierce criticism but ignorance and indifference.

The main benefit, however, of having people disagreeing with you on a particular subject, be it Israel, domestic politics, welfare in America, immigration laws, the future of Conservative Judaism, or the state of the shul, is that it opens a conversation. In the last month, since I wrote my article, I was invited to one lunch, one breakfast, and two coffees with cake – *"Rabbi, let me invite you for lunch so we can discuss your latest article."*

While I was coming home from one of these luncheons, I was reflecting on how lucky I am to have congregants who not only treat me to a nice lunch, but are willing to open themselves to an exchange of ideas and opinions. For me, these exchanges are enlightening. First of all, they do challenge my opinions and views and force me to articulate them better, or to change them. Secondly, they invite me to read more and, in general, to be more informed. Last but not least, they remind me of a very important truth in congregational life and in life in general: we can agree or disagree with others as long as we can talk about it, doing it respectfully and showing that we care.

With love and respect for all of you,

Rabbi Manes Kogan