



September 1, 2018

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

דע לך שכל רועה ורועה יש לו ניגון מיוחד משלו.

"You should know that each and every shepherd has his own melody" (Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *Likutei Moharan Tinyana* 63)

As you know, there are 613 commandments in the Torah. If these were not enough, our Jewish tradition adds countless traditions, which, despite not having the formal status of laws, have been embraced by previous generations and passed down to us. Some of the best known Jewish practices associated with the High Holy Days belong to this category of traditions, among them: Tashlich, dipping apples in honey, sending Rosh Hashanah cards, and changing the Torah covers to white.

It should not come as a surprise that congregations establish their own unique traditions, which throughout the years take root and blend with the established traditions of the Jewish calendar. At Hillcrest Jewish Center, for example, children come to the bimah for the end of services, announcements are being made by the president of the shul, and officers get honors during Shabbat Shuvah.

One of these Hillcrest Jewish Center traditions, which I inherited 12 years ago and I am sure preceded me by many years, is that past presidents come to the bimah to hold the Torah Scrolls for Kol Nidrei. How did this tradition begin and who started it is something I don't know (maybe one of our readers can enlighten us). All I know is that this is a tradition that took root and that many, if not all of our past presidents, look forward to it.

Personally, I believe this is a beautiful tradition. First, our newest members (almost half of the members of Hillcrest Jewish Center joined our shul in the last 15 years) get to know who served as a president in the congregation they belong to. Second, it provides our shul and its members with an opportunity to recognize publicly those who accepted the mantle of leadership, gave countless hours of their personal and family time to the shul, and, in many cases, suffered abuse and aggravation as they tried their best to lead the destiny of our shul. Third, it celebrates continuity. By having 10 or more past presidents standing together, it reminds all of us that klai kodesh and lay leaders are part of a chain of people who came before us and follow us. Fourth, by looking at who is there, it helps us remember who is not: those who passed away, those who rarely get out from their home, and those who moved out of town. Last, but not least, by looking at each past president of Hillcrest Jewish Center, we should reflect with Rabbi Nachman that "each and every shepherd has his or her own melody." Each lay leader, each rabbi, cantor, educator, professional,

brings his or her own style, strength, weakness, personality, and baggage. Each leader who served our shul confronted a unique set of challenges, transitions, difficulties, which marked his or her term – a new rabbi, a capital campaign, a tragic death in the congregation, the restructuring of the building facility, ideological shifts, and demographical challenges.

The truth is that this doesn't apply only to leaders, but to all of us. Each of us brings to the table our own strengths and weaknesses, our complex personalities, and our heavy baggage. Each of us is confronted in life by a unique set of challenges and transitions.

As these High Holy Days approach, let's meet them with humility, with love and with compassion. Let's look at those who dedicated and continue to dedicate their time and resources to benefit our shul, with a feeling of appreciation and recognition. As we enter the Day of Judgment, let's leave the judgment to God, and embrace the members of our community, our congregation, and our family with kindness and understanding.

May Hashem bless all of you and your loved ones with a good, sweet, healthy, joyous, and peaceful year.

Rabbi Manes Kogan