



October 1, 2018

Dear Friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

A couple of months ago, a long-time member of Hillcrest Jewish Center who doesn't come very often to shul, stopped by my office and shared with me: "Rabbi, when I come to shul on Shabbat I don't recognize half of the people!" And he added: "And this is good!"

What this long-time member was expressing, in his own funny way, is that while many of the old members he remembered are not any longer with us, many new faces he didn't recognize have become regulars at Hillcrest Jewish Center.

This member's observation is right on target. Hillcrest lost many of its older and long-time members. Some of them sadly passed away and many others moved out of town. However, almost half of the current members of HJC joined our shul in the last 15 years, among them many members of the Board of Trustees, including the next two officers in line to be our future shul presidents.

Given this new reality, it is fundamental to reflect on our identity as a congregation, not when Hillcrest Jewish Center was founded, almost 80 years ago, or 40 years ago, but today.

By now you are aware that Hillcrest Jewish Center will be participating in a program called the **Thriving Synagogue Learning Tool**, funded by the UJA-Federation of New York, which is working with the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University to measure how synagogues are and are not thriving. A thriving synagogue is vital and alive. It is imbued with a sense of purpose, activity, and energy. The Learning Tool survey measures how our congregation is thriving; it does not evaluate our staff, lay leaders or volunteers, nor does it measure congregant satisfaction. This program will help us better understand where our synagogue excels and where we can improve, which areas merit appreciation and celebration and which areas call for planning and action.

In order for this learning tool to be effective, it is imperative that we reach a very high level of participation (hopefully 100%). Many of you already completed the survey but "many" is not enough. Everyone's' opinion is important – long time members and newer members. The responses, which are individual and will remain confidential, will give us access to expert coaching by UJA in understanding our results and applying them to plans and action.

Silvia, Daniela, Ilan and I already have completed our surveys and we encourage each of you to do the same. If you wish to complete the survey but don't have access to a computer, we will help you complete it at Hillcrest Jewish Center or will have someone visit you at home. Just call the office and let us know.

As the logo of this important program expresses: "Your voice is our future!" Please take 15 minutes to complete the survey, if you haven't, so we can grow and thrive together!

Many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan