

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center:

As I write this message, it is exactly one month since our shul has shut down its physical doors due to the COVID19 crisis. I said explicitly *physical doors*, because our beloved shul seems more active than ever with Zoom prayers, classes, and meetings. This unprecedented crisis with its real unexaggerated challenges and no small measure of pain and suffering, has brought out the best in most people, including countless Hillcrest Jewish Center members who are making calls, visiting other members, volunteering to buy groceries, driving people to doctors' appointments, teaching Zoom skills, and sending encouraging emails both to the lay and professional leaders of our shul.

And speaking of lay and professional leaders, this is a great opportunity to thank the HJC staff who keep things going in the back to give a sense of normalcy to all of us in the front, and to the lay leaders who, in addition to the professionals and Klai Kodesh, continue to teach and run programs for all of us.

While it is very obvious to everybody what we are missing due to the COVID19 crisis, it is less obvious what the good is that is coming from it. While it is far from my intention to make an apology of suffering, I believe that we will do well to ponder on new insights we have gained in the last month of national quarantine.

To begin with, we learned at Hillcrest that we can and should think outside the box. People who never joined us in prayers or studied Torah before are finding Zoom interaction either more appealing or convenient. While it doesn't work for everybody, remote learning does work for many people and expands the possibilities enormously. While we look forward to physical gatherings soon, we shouldn't discount remote learning, for example, even after this crisis.

But besides the use of technology, we are seeing new patterns of positive behavior and new levels of awareness, which were very much needed. While I believe I could provide some of these insights myself, let me share some by Michael Reagan, a Los Angeles columnist, who in my humble opinion nailed down an approach that all of us may wish to take, especially since many of the macro decisions are not in our hands.

Writes Michael Reagan:

If they cancel the rest of the school year, students would miss 2.5 months, or more, of school (that is in the northern hemisphere). Many people are concerned about students falling behind because of this. Yes, they may fall behind when it comes to classroom education...but what if...

What if instead of falling "behind", this generation of youth are **ADVANCED** because of this?

What if they have more empathy, they enjoy family connection, they can be more creative and entertain themselves, they love to read, they love to express themselves in writing.

What if they enjoy the simple things, like their own backyard and sitting near a window in the quiet?

What if they notice the birds and the dates the different flowers emerge, and the calming renewal of a gentle rain shower?

What if this generation are the ones to learn to cook, organize their space, do their laundry, and keep a well-run home?

What if they learn to stretch a dollar and to live with less?

What if they learn to plan shopping trips and meals at home?

What if they learn the value of eating together as a family and finding the good to share in the small delights of the everyday?

What if they are the ones to place great value on our health care workers and their supporting staff, teachers and educational professionals, transportation service workers, librarians, public servants and the previously invisible essential support workers like truck drivers, grocers, cashiers, and custodians, just to name a few of the millions taking care of us right now while we are sheltered in place?

What if among these children, a great leader emerges who had the benefit of a slower pace and a simpler life to truly learn what really matters in this life?

What if they are AHEAD?"

Let me add that these lessons are not only for our children, but for all of us. While we pray for the COVID19 crisis to end soon, let's continue to build a strong Hillcrest community, based on kindness, love and compassion, and let's draw from these difficult times lessons which make us more resilient and sensitive in the future.

With blessings and love,

Rabbi Manes Kogan