

Dear Friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center:

The Tishrei holidays are over and I believe it is more than appropriate to acknowledge the huge effort that was involved in carrying the High Holy Days, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah to good term.

Ginger already thanked everybody who contributed to the success of the holidays and I fully echo her words. What was accomplished under extenuating circumstances, is something to make all of us proud of our beloved shul and its special people.

Since I don't wish to repeat what Ginger so eloquently said at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, I will add only two remarks to hers.

The first one is a big Yasher Koach to Ginger herself. Ginger is not just a great leader, but a great leader in a time of crisis. Faced with difficult, controversial, and complex decisions, Ginger was able to balance the safety of our members and the functionality of our shul. Ginger put together think-tanks, listened respectfully to different opinions, communicated often with the shul members, and communicated well. Her Sunday State of the Shul addresses not only kept us informed but gave all of us the feeling that someone who had her act together was in charge.

Moreover, Ginger and the leadership of our shul were ready to take calculated risks to put Hillcrest Jewish Center at the vanguard of the non-orthodox shuls in Queens and Nassau Counties, with a practical response to synagogue reopening. When other rabbis in Queens and Long Island call you looking for advice, they are telling you that you are doing something right.

Since we didn't have experience in running services in a time of COVID, all of us learned along the way. We tweaked what needed to be tweaked and found creative ways to do things differently. People gave us feedback and we incorporated them. It was truly a team effort and a labor of love.

My second remark is about how all services throughout the High Holy Days, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah were led by volunteers, lay people, young and not so young, who did a remarkable job. What is even more noteworthy is that people we didn't originally have in mind as service leaders, when they saw other volunteers doing the job, they stepped forward to make a difference. Our human capital, the cumulative knowledge we have at Hillcrest Jewish Center among people who know how to *daven by the amud* (how to lead services), how to *layan* (how to read Torah), and how to teach Torah, is extraordinary, and it is something other shuls are talking about. Personally, I believe that having volunteers, lay people, who know how to do things only professionals do in other shuls, is becoming a trademark of Hillcrest Jewish Center, a trademark that fills me with nachas (Jewish pride for those who need translation).

In a time of pandemic we achieved all the above, while keeping classes going almost every day of the week, having support groups, work meetings, social gatherings, and

a thriving minyan twice a day. We only missed 8 minyanim out of more than 250 since June 14.

As we are ready to begin our new post-holidays routine, starting new classes and resuming old ones, let's pause to celebrate our collective past accomplishments, praying that they will pave the way for new ones in the future.

Rabbi Manes Kogan