

## My Rabbinate in 60 Words or Less

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

As you are aware, last January 31<sup>st</sup>, I received a Doctorate in Divinity Honoris Causa from the Jewish Theological Seminary, honoring my 25+ years in the rabbinate. In preparation for that occasion, each rabbi was asked to describe the essence of his or her rabbinate in 60 words.

I must confess that I rarely used the word count feature on my word processor, but 60 words was a non-negotiable requirement if I wanted my degree.

For those who attended the virtual convocation, what was read about each rabbi was basically the way each of us summarized his or her rabbinate in a very short paragraph.

While the 60-word statement was a requirement, I saw it as an opportunity to address the following questions: What is my rabbinate about? What is the vision that guides my work, my vocation? What do I believe is the role of a rabbi?

I know I would probably not have given too much thought to these crucial questions, if not for the assignment I was handed, and yet I am grateful I was forced to do so.

Since I don't expect each of you to remember what was read about me a month ago, let me share the words with you:

*"Manes Kogan: You have served congregations in Argentina, the Dominican Republic and the United States, and have made a difference in your congregants' lives.*

*You believe that teaching Torah, leading services, and living a life of kindness are not solely within the purview of synagogue professionals, and you have empowered your congregants to become Torah teachers, prayer leaders, and spreaders of chesed in the community. Mazal Tov!"*

If you take out the Manes Kogan at the beginning and the Mazal Tov at the end, you get exactly 63 words (I guess the JTS wasn't so strict after all). While the first 15 words describe the places where I served, the last 50 summarize my rabbinate: I wish to make a difference in your lives and I believe in empowering each of you to live lives of Torah, prayer, and lovingkindness.

At the beginning of my rabbinate in my early 30s, I believed that being a good rabbi was equal to being loved by my congregants. Then the expected love evolved into expected respect.

Today, while I still believe in the importance of earning the respect of my congregants, and I enjoy love and recognition (who doesn't?), I know these are not enough.

Each rabbi should have a vision, and I am grateful I was persuaded into putting mine in writing.

The vision I just shared with you, the one I was able to articulate in 50 words, is what guides my daily work. While it is a personal vision, I am sure you realized by now, that each of you is part of it. After all, a rabbi can only be a rabbi through the interaction with the people he or she serves.

So, as I celebrate 25+ years in the rabbinate, I also celebrate all of you, who are the reason why I do what I do.

May we go together from strength to strength!

Rabbi Manes Kogan