

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

As I write these words, I am on my way back from Fort Jackson, South Carolina. As you may be aware by now, I successfully completed the chaplain course, graduated with honors, and received the award for best oral and written communication, one of the four distinctions awarded to my class of eighty-eight peers.

If you detect a sense of pride in my first few lines, you are correct. While I have accomplished many important milestones in my professional career, this was one of the most challenging ones and perhaps one of the most rewarding ones, as well.

It is not a secret that I travelled to South Carolina with a sense of trepidation and concern. After all, I had attempted this journey before, and I wasn't successful. By not giving up, I was rewarded with a wonderful experience, one that I look forward to sharing with you in the upcoming days. For the time being, let me say that I met wonderful people, made new friends, learned valuable skills, and returned home enriched by the experience.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you, the members of Hillcrest Jewish Center, for supporting me in this personal and professional endeavor, one that was important to me. Especially, I would like to thank the many HJC members who stepped up to assume the various responsibilities involved in keeping our wonderful shul and community going strong and vibrant. I am very proud of all of you.

When I arrive from Fort Jackson on August 18th, I plan on hitting the ground running. In a few days, we will celebrate Ben Weiner's Bar Mitzvah, then at the beginning of September, I will resume my Talmud classes and start working on a few new series of classes for the upcoming year (stay tuned!). A big appointment coming up is my haircut at the barbershop to make sure I look my best for the Gala Dinner on September 8th, and then it's time to get ready for the last preparations before Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and the Tishrei Holidays.

My family and I have completed 18 years at Hillcrest Jewish Center. When I look back at all these past years, my heart is full of gratitude and appreciation for all your kindness and blessings.

I look forward to many more years together, during which we can learn, support each other, celebrate smachot, and grow together.

With love and appreciation,

L'Shana Tova Tikateivu,

Rabbi Manes Kogan