

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

What are the most important days in the Jewish calendar?

The answer to this question, of course, depends on who you ask. As I mentioned in my d'var Torah on the Shabbat after Yom Kippur, many rabbis believe that the most important days in the Jewish calendar are the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, also known as the Days of Awe. While every rabbi gets extra busy during these days and the few days leading to them, there are many rabbis who build their entire shul-year as a crescendo towards the High Holy Days. After all, these are the days on which most congregants attend services and they present us with a unique opportunity to showcase our synagogues, the work we do, to engage potential new members, and to fundraise for the year ahead. Many of these rabbis “rehearse” services, bring special speakers, and micromanage every single detail to achieve “perfect services.”

How do I know so much about these rabbis? Because I used to be one of them. Especially in Argentina, when I was a rabbinical student in charge of a congregation or even during my first couple of years as a congregational rabbi, I spent hours of meetings, rehearsals, and planning for the three most important days in the Jewish calendar.

When we returned to classes after the High Holy Days were over, Rabbi Marshal Meyer, the founder of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano, welcomed us with “tell me about your success!” Both during classes and on one-to-one conversations with colleagues, we shared stories of how successful our services were, how many people attended, how long our *tekia gedolah* was, and how many nice ladies cried because of our meaningful sermons.

This was me over 25 years ago. While I don't look back at those years with regret, it is not where I have been for many years now.

Today I understand that the most important days in the Jewish calendar are the 344 days between Yom Kippur and the next Rosh Hashana. In other words, for me as a rabbi, the most important days on the shul calendar are the days I spend building the yearly routine of Hillcrest Jewish Center. I measure success not by how many people attended Yizkor, or how long my *tekia gedolah* was at the end of Yom Kippur (actually I believe it was pretty awesome). The truth is that I measure success by how many more people have been joining us for Shabbat, how many people come to minyan, how many of our members know how to lead services, how many successful small groups we have, and how kind our congregants are.

For the few rabbis who belong to this smaller group, the question we ask when we meet after Yom Kippur is not “how successful were you?” but “how did you survive the holidays?” For those who know me it is not a secret that the High Holy Days are a stressful time for me. Yes, these 10 days are important, but only because of the seeds I can plant for the other 344 days that follow.

So, now that I told you about the most important days of the Jewish calendar for me, I hope you really believe that the High Holy Days at Hillcrest Jewish Center were successful, and even more important, that through your involvement, your prayers, your learning, and your acts of kindness (*chesed*), you help us make the next many days leading to the next High Holy Days, even more successful.

With many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan