



June 1, 2026

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

Last May 7, I attended my first annual gala dinner of the NYPD Shomrim Society. As the newly elected spiritual leader of the Shomrim Society, I was asked to share a message with the guests attending. Since I find it relevant to our congregational life as well, I am sharing an excerpt from it with you, with the hope that you will find it meaningful and relevant as well.

Dear Shomrim:

I am honored to be one of you, to be part of this 100-year-old organization, and to follow in the footsteps of Rabbi Alvin Kass, of blessed memory. I hope I can make a difference both within the NYPD community and for our Jewish members, active and retired.

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As you may know, on the way to the Promised Land, the Children of Israel camped in the wilderness in a precise, organized manner. The tribes were clustered around the Mishkan (the Tabernacle), each under their own standard and the colors of their fathers' houses. The Mishkan was placed in the center, with the Levites closest, surrounded by four main divisions of three tribes each.

In addition, according to a Midrashic tradition, when the Children of Israel left Egypt and stood before the Sea of Reeds, the water split into twelve separate paths—one for each tribe—allowing them to pass through on dry land. This imagery emphasizes individualized divine attention and highlights the unique character of each tribe.

The question we should be asking ourselves is this: If we were all slaves in Egypt, if HaShem redeemed us all together, gave us the Torah as a collective, and led us to the Promised Land as Am Echad, B'Lev Echad (one people, with one heart), wouldn't it have made more sense to de-emphasize the differences between the tribes? Why not camp all together under one flag? Why not pass through the Sea of Reeds as one, marching together like in the film The Ten Commandments or The Prince of Egypt? If we share a mission, why do we need different paths?

I would suggest that HaShem understands that to make our best contribution to the whole, we must first strengthen our core affiliation—our immediate family connection. In other words, we fight together as one people, but we fight better knowing that our closest brothers and sisters are near us and have our backs.

Paraphrasing King Solomon in Kohelet, there is a time to be united as one, and there is a time to stand by our own individual flags, with those with whom we share specific values and a particular history. Hence, the paramount importance of fraternal organizations within the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

Yes, we all share the same mission: to enhance the quality of life in New York City by working in partnership with the community to enforce the law, preserve peace, reduce fear, and maintain order, while treating all citizens with respect and maintaining high integrity.

And yet, each religious, ethnic, and affinity group, along with each specialized organization within the NYPD, is strengthened by its uniqueness—an extra shared purpose that supports the larger mission. By fostering diversity, camaraderie, and professional development, these fraternal organizations (of which Shomrim is one of the oldest and best-organized) ensure that the sum of all parts makes the whole department stronger.

I am proud and honored to march, both under the flag of the NYPD, and the flag of the Shomrim Society.

I look forward to getting to know all of you better in the coming year, and to making my own contribution to the Shomrim Society and to the New York City Police Department.

May HaShem bless you and your loved ones with only good things.

Rabbi Manes Kogan