



July 1, 2026

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

Last week Silvia shared with me a short article she was writing as an assignment for an educators' conference she was planning to attend. After reading her piece, I thought that the same idea could apply to our congregation or to any community of members with a shared mission or interest. We all want to believe that we matter, that our existence has meaning, that we count, that we are more than a speck of dust floating adrift.

I like to see our shul as a place where our members count, where we can make meaningful connections and live lives that matter. We are not there yet, but we can work all together towards that lofty goal.

With Silvia's permission, I am sharing her piece with you. I hope you will find it meaningful as I did.

Many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan

He [God] determines the number of stars and calls them each by name (Psalms 147:4).

This verse in the book of Psalms teaches that God "determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name." Although there are countless stars in the universe, God knows every single one individually.

A midrash by Eben Ezra adds that some stars are so distant that their light never reaches Earth, yet they are still known and counted by God. Also, looking at the night sky, we are reminded that appearances can be deceiving, as sometimes we can see brightness in the sky that looks like a single star in the night, but they are clusters made up of many stars.

By the end of each school year, I ask my staff to write end-of-year report cards. I try very hard to get to know, at least by name, each child in my school, but of course, I always miss some. Last week as I was reviewing the students' report cards, I was reminded of this verse.

It made me feel a sense of accomplishment as I was reading the report cards, and I was able to recognize these children. I was even able to suggest to the teacher adding a sentence or two of things that I had noted. As teachers, this gives us a chance to review each child individually, recognizing their own separate light, their strengths, and their challenges. Even quiet children, whose accomplishments may not always be visible, are seen and appreciated.

Likewise, a student is much more than what we see on the surface. Behind each child is a unique combination of talents, interests, friendships, efforts, and experiences. Just as the psalmist mentions that God looks beyond the brightness of a star to know its true nature, educators should strive to look beyond grades and behavior to understand and nurture the whole child.

At the end of the year, reviewing report cards is not only about measuring achievement, but also about recognizing the unique light each student brings to our school community, to our own school universe.

Like the stars in the sky, every child matters, every child has a place, and every child is known.

Like the psalmist suggests, knowing that God knows the stars so intimately offers comfort that someone cares for us in every aspect of our lives and each one is accounted for.

Silvia Surazski Kogan