



October 1, 2026

From the Rabbi's Desk

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

As I write this message, it is the 6th yahrzeit of my mother, may her memory be for a blessing.

For many years my brother and I went out of our way to celebrate our mother on Mother's Day: we made our beds, washed the dishes, and put our toys away, leaving these "annoying tasks" for my mother during the other 364 days of the year.

Witnessing the disparity between our love and dedication on Mother's Day, and our slacking the rest of the year, my mother used to remind us that a mother's love, care, and sacrifices are a 24/7 commitment that deserves to be appreciated every single day of the year, not just on a single calendar date.

My mother's insight on Mother's Day serves as a reminder that we might be able to constrain buying of gifts to one day a year, but when it comes to relationships, virtues, and character traits, anything less than "all the time" is flawed.

Imagine answering "occasionally" to a spouse's question: do you love me? or commenting that you are honest Monday through Friday, or that you are kind twice a week.

And yet, in congregational settings we talk about chesed committees, or mitzvah projects, as if we could limit chesed to a particular group of people or caring for the needy to twice or three times a year.

Based on the above, I would like to suggest a different approach to understanding chesed and mitzvah projects in the context of schools, community organizations, or congregations like ours. I would like to illustrate my point of view by pondering on the mitzvah project, each bar or bat mitzvah at Hillcrest Jewish Center - and in most congregations - is required to do as part of their bar or bat mitzvah preparation.

Let me pause to share with you, that throughout the years, we had our students performing wonderful acts of chesed as part of their mitzvah projects, including delivering flowers to members of our shul, putting together packages of toys and toiletries to be delivered at the Ronald McDonald House, organizing collections of food and books, working in soup kitchens, tutoring younger children after school, or playing an instrument in a nursing home.

Our young men and women often share how meaningful the experience was and how good they felt by making a difference (you can read, for example about Gabrielle Solomon's Mitzvah project in this Bulletin). And the same, of course, is true for adults as well.

The challenge, now, for all of us, is how we transform a mitzvah project into a life of mitzvot; how we move from a chesed committee to a congregation that lives and breathes chesed.

I would like to suggest that the first step is to understand a mitzvah project and the involvement in a chesed committee as a starting point, as a laboratory to explore how transformative the experience can be, not only to the beneficiaries of our kindness, but to us as well.

And then we take baby steps, once a month, once a week, using our time, our money, our physical work, our smile and our kind words, to transform kindness from an activity to a way of life, and to transform the world from what it is to what it ought and can be,

Rabbi Manes Kogan