

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

... Gratitude

The Funny Thing About Gratitude

By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher

It happens to everyone: that moment when your phone is about to run out of battery, and suddenly a charger appears in your bag. That quick “thank goodness” before moving on with the day. Or when you’re running late to work, hitting every green light, and breathing a sigh of relief without a second thought about what – or who – might be behind that streak of good luck.

Consider the story that made rounds on social media last summer. A young entrepreneur had maxed out her credit cards trying to keep her small business afloat during the pandemic. She’d post daily prayers on Instagram, asking G-d for help to save her coffee shop. When a news station featured her story, customers started pouring in. Within months, she was opening a second location. In interviews, she credited her “amazing marketing strategy” and “perfect timing” – seemingly forgetting all those desperate prayers that came before her success.

People have a fascinating habit of reaching out to G-d when times are tough and then taking all the credit when things turn around. Like that old joke about the guy circling the block, desperately looking for parking. He promises G-d he’ll donate a hundred dollars to charity if he finds a spot. The moment one appears, he quickly says, “Never mind, I’ve got this handled!” It’s a common pattern.

This tendency to forget gratitude in good times is actually addressed in the Torah, where Moses offers some timeless wisdom to the Israelites. “Beware,” he warns them, “lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” This message transcends time and place. Moses wasn’t just talking about ancient history – he was describing human nature.

Consider our modern “Egypt moments.” Maybe it’s recovering from a health scare or finally landing that job after months of searching. In those dark times, people have deep, honest conversations with G-d. They make promises, bargain, and pray with an intensity they didn’t know they had. Then, once they’re back on their feet, how quickly they return to business as usual.

Take the story of a contractor who never missed Sunday service. When his business nearly went under during the housing market slump, he prayed daily for a miracle. Sure enough, he landed a major renovation contract that turned everything around. These days, he’s so busy with work that he barely makes it to church. “G-d blessed me with good business sense,” he tells anyone who asks about his success.

Moses understood something fundamental about human nature: people tend to forget their blessings when times are good. It’s like having a perfect Wi-Fi connection – no one thinks about it until it stops working. Then suddenly, they’re ready to promise anything to get back online.

But here’s the truth: genuine gratitude isn’t just about remembering to say thanks during tough times. It’s about maintaining that awareness when everything’s going right. It’s about acknowledging that our successes, good fortune, and even those perfectly timed parking spots come from G-d rather than our own cleverness.

The message is universal: don’t wait for hard times to practice gratitude. Sometimes – and hopefully it doesn’t come to this – it takes a reversal of fortune to remind us who’s really in charge of all those green lights we’ve been sailing through.

This isn’t about adopting an artificial sense of piety or maintaining a constant state of prayer. Instead, it’s about developing a genuine awareness of God’s presence in our daily lives. Acknowledging the source of our morning coffee, the ability to work, or the gift of family and friends could be as simple as acknowledging it. These small moments of recognition can transform our relationship with both our blessings and their source.

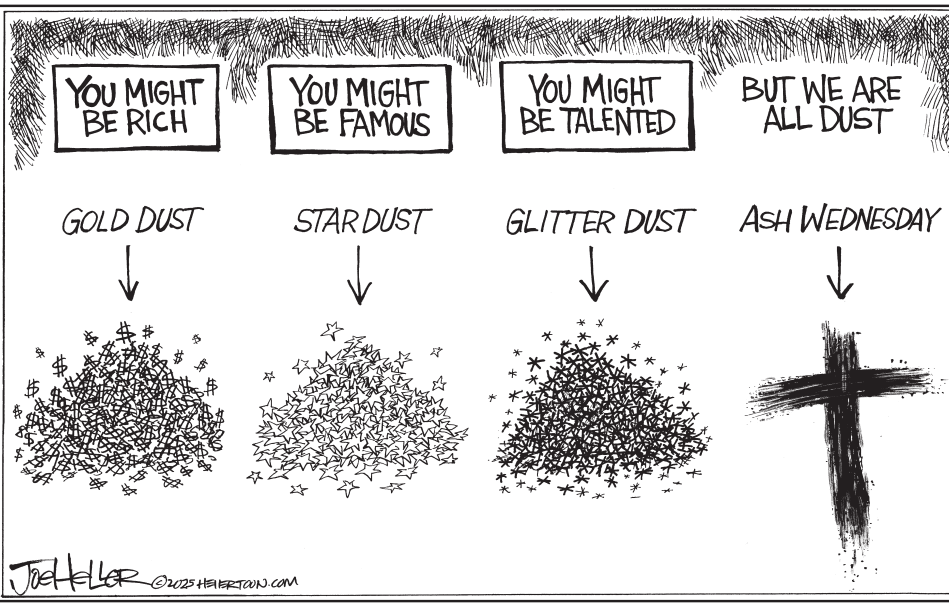
Some might argue that maintaining constant gratitude is unrealistic in today’s fast-paced world. But perhaps that’s exactly why it’s more important than ever. In an age of instant gratification and self-made success stories, taking time to acknowledge G-d’s role in our achievements isn’t just an act of faith – it’s a powerful reminder of our connection to something greater than ourselves.

Perhaps the next time things are going well, we should pause for a moment. Not just when desperate, not just when in need, but especially when everything’s perfect. Because that’s when gratitude matters most. After all, true wisdom isn’t just about knowing when to ask for help – it’s about remembering who to thank when that help arrives.

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Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger



Another Man In A Hurry

State Route 75 from Towns County into Helen, Georgia, follows a portion of the old Unicoi Turnpike, a route that has been in use for over 1000 years and longer when you consider the migrating game the early inhabitants trailed. If you live here, it’s almost certain that you traveled that route occasionally, because any other way south adds many extra miles to the trip.

Growing up in Gainesville with grandparents in Towns County, then living here while working in Helen and Cleveland, I’ve traveled that route countless times. We visited the grandparents often when I was very young, and some of my favorite memories were gathered along the way.

Back then, the two-lane blacktop was a lot closer to the ancient game trail than the current highway with its passing lanes and pullouts. The road was narrow, and the curves were sharp, and it seemed like it was always foggy when we crossed the mountain at night heading south. Aware of the hazards of the trip, our grandparents would always insist on praying for us before we left their house. There is no expiration date on a prayer of faith, and I’m convinced the humble entreaties of those dear old souls have kept me safe many times.

As longtime residents are somewhat painfully aware, the story of our region is one of growth, slowly and then all at once. As a small child riding in the back seat of an AMC Rambler station wagon, we were usually the only vehicle on the road crossing the mountain at night. Over the years, we got company. Lots of company.

I wish I knew the formula for predicting the critical mass of humanity, that threshold of population density necessary for a sharp reduction in intelligence and common sense which occurs when humans gather. It can happen anywhere, but some geographic locations seem to serve as a multiplier in that equation. As we traversed our mountain road with more fellow travelers, the frequency of what my senior drill instructor called “idiot attacks” began to increase.

On one memorable occasion along that route, we saw a bear scavenging in a garbage can which was then placed for the convenience of travelers who used the pullout where a historical plaque informed visitors about the beautiful vista to the south. Several weekend tourists had parked there and were out of their vehicles, 20 feet from the bear and taking pictures. One candidate for a Darwin Award was attempting to offer the bear a sandwich. Dad didn’t stick around to let us see how that turned out.

As tourism increased, the plaque was stolen, replaced, stolen again, and then the project was abandoned. They took away the garbage can.

On a Saturday morning, we were northbound on SR 75 to see the grandparents and had to stop because a car had gone off the mountain at the overlook. I don’t know if this was a health-related incident or if an idiot attack contributed to the driver’s inability to stay on the road. We were several cars back in a line waiting to get past the wrecker blocking both lanes as it winched the wrecked car back up the long, steep incline.

The weight of the car caused the front wheels of the wrecker to lift high off the pavement, temporarily clearing the northbound lane. It was surely an idiot attack that inspired the impatient driver closest to the wrecker to burn rubber and scoot under the airborne wheels with his wife and kids. They cleared the wrecker just as the winch slipped and the wheels bounced back down to the pavement. To this day that remains the single dumbest thing I’ve ever seen a human do.

The idiot attacks have continued and increased in frequency. Tracey and I were almost collateral damage in an attack that occurred last Friday on our way north. On Fridays from just after school lets out until sometime after 6, we would rather be anywhere than on the Helen Mountain; nevertheless, about 4 o’clock we found ourselves in a line of cars heading north along our storied route.

I can only imagine what the young driver in the black Range Rover was thinking, if she was thinking at all. The windows were heavily tinted, but we could see rapid hand movements which seemed to be animating a spirited conversation. We were strongly of the opinion that those hands would have been better engaged in gripping the steering wheel as she came within inches of sideswiping us, passing on the right after the lane had already merged to the left. Her parents might have been able to afford her insurance premium and the repairs, but apparently she missed the physics class which explained how two objects can’t occupy the same space at the same time.

I have no idea what she did to offend the older driver behind us, the one in a dark SUV with a handicapped sticker on the license plate, but apparently she threatened his safety or his manhood, or both. An idiot attack inspired him to roar around us on a curve so he could get behind the Range Rover and ride its bumper until he was able to pass and then hit the brakes hard, threatening a pileup behind. Those of us behind, dropping back to create a safer distance from the spectacle, got to creep along at about 20 mph until the aggressor made his point and spent, hopefully, the last measure of his rage by passing every other car on the mountain until he was out of sight.

All drivers, young and old, would be advised to remember that though modern vehicles packed with electronics and features may feel like a video game, unlike the game, there are real-world consequences for driving decisions that are rude, aggressive, or stupid. We live in a society on edge with political, cultural, and economic stress, and you never know who has collected more than their share, or whose impulse control has atrophied due to lack of practice or been degraded by alcohol, drugs, or emotional instability.

For the rest of us, adopting a few simple habits will help us keep the peace we came here to find in contrast to the places we moved to escape. There is no justification for road rage on a warm, bright winter day along a beautiful mountain road, where the traffic now is a fraction of what it will be in a few weeks.

If you’re in a hurry, it’s not the fault of the car you’re following that your planning was insufficient. Get up earlier. Lose the self-importance. You don’t know the story inside that slow-moving vehicle in front of you. The driver may be traveling as fast as they can safely go. Maybe they can’t afford to hire someone to drive them to the doctor, and their kids don’t come around anymore. Someone in the car may have motion sickness on the winding road, or be on their way back from a chemotherapy session. They may simply be exercising the right to choose their own pace and enjoy the scenery.

If you’re not in a hurry, stay in the right lane. Why is this so difficult for some people to understand? When there are cars crowding you from behind, for God’s sake use one of the numerous pullouts on the mountain instead of bowing up, slowing down, and “proving” that you can’t be intimidated. Remember why you’re not in a hurry and be grateful that you don’t have to be. While you were shopping and having dinner, the guy behind you was finishing his 60-hour work week and he wants to get home while there is a bit of daylight left to spend some time with his family or do some of the chores left undone during an exhausting week.

The group most prone to road rage are millennials. This has probably been true throughout the ages, even when the most frequent travelers on our mountain were young bucks looking for somewhere to rub the felt off their antlers. The next group most prone to rage is Generation X between 41 and 56, the years most likely for someone to have an insufferable boss at work. Next up are the Boomers, who feel entitled by their experience and economic status. All of these groups are trying to get over the mountain at the same time on a Friday afternoon and it’s not always a cordial gathering.

To Burn or Not to Burn?

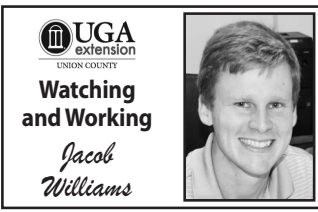
We are entering the time of year when prescribed burns are more and more common. I want to talk about why prescribed burns are important. I think that generally we understand that they are important, otherwise we wouldn’t take the risk of doing them, but they are important in more ways than many understand.

To talk about the importance of prescribed burns we also have to talk about natural forest succession. Forest succession can look different depending on where you live. For us, it can start with meadow lands. Meadows would have plants like asters, queen Anne’s lace, and broom sedge. After about 5 years, the meadows will start to grow up some more and brush like sumac and blackberry will start to take over. At year 20, we would see a young pine forest start to emerge. This pine forest would start to mature and at about year 70, we would see an understory of hardwoods begin to emerge in the mature pine stand. From year 70 on, the forest begins to transition to a hardwood forest. At 100 years, we’ve reached the forest climax which is a mature oak-hickory forest. If there is no intervention, either natural or man-made, our forests will remain at the mature oak-hickory forest stage.

So, what’s wrong with allowing our forests to stay at the mature oak-hickory stage? And if it is wrong then what can be done about it? To answer the first question when all or a majority of our habitat is in the mature oak-hickory stage we have less diversity of habitat. Diversity of habitat is necessary to be able to support a diversity of wildlife, plants, fungi, and everything else that creeps, crawls, and grows in the woods. Deer need a diverse habitat to thrive. They need brush cover to protect fawns. Mature forests have very little cover and leave fawns exposed to roaming coyotes and bears. The deer also need mature forest for the mast crop (acorns and other nuts) that those trees provide every year. Our deer population is in decline, which is not due to overhunting as there are fewer and fewer hunters each year. Turkey populations are also in decline, in part because there is not sufficient brush cover for poults (baby turkeys). Bobwhite quail have become very rare in Georgia, because they need brush for their habitat. Grouse have also become rare because they make their home in the transition area between habitat types. These are just a few examples of species that we have seen a decline or significant decline in population.

Controlled burns reset the natural forest succession process, allowing a diverse array of habitats that support a diverse array of wildlife. Historically, in the southern US, wildfires would burn parts of the landscape every 1 to 3 years. Now in the southeast it’s estimated that 4% of lands that could be burned are in a burn rotation. With the development that we have now it’s a good thing that we don’t have wildfires raging through the southeast every 1 to 3 years. Controlled burns are able to keep the fuel load in the forest down to prevent that from happening. But if we don’t have enough controlled burns or responsible timber harvest from public lands then we won’t see the rejuvenation of the forest necessary for it to sustain a diverse group of species for generation after generation.

If you have questions about controlled burns you can contact the Georgia Forestry Commission, the US Forest Service, or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.



Letters to the Editor

I Was Just Wondering

Dear Editor,

How will mass firings of civil service employees effect Veterans services? Children and adults who depend upon Medicaid for vital health services? Medical research into cancer and future pandemics? Head Start for vulnerable preschoolers? Income tax refunds? Consumer protection by the (now defunct) Consumer Financial Protection Agency?

And what about farmers who will lose billions of dollars because the United States is no longer sending food to poverty stricken people around the globe? How will this effect America’s reputation globally?

And I was just wondering... How does a non-elected billionaire from South Africa have the authority to obtain access to the private data of African citizens? And why is Congress, and more specifically, our representative to Congress, allowing this to take place?

I was just wondering,
Jennifer Cordier

Losing Medicaid in Towns County

Dear Editor,

I rarely write letters about local problems, but this is too important to ignore.

Our 9th District Representative, Andrew Clyde, has just voted to gut Medicaid in America. This is serious for our county, and here’s why.

Thirty-seven percent of Towns County residents are senior citizens, and 33% depend on Medicaid in some way.

That would include the “Meals on Wheels” program, the hospital’s nursing home – where 75% of residents are on Medicaid – our county Health Department, and our Chatuge Regional Hospital that has 5% of all patients on Medicaid.

Without Medicaid, there’s a very good chance that the nursing home would not stay open. The hospital would either have to raise rates or not be able to stay open.

Now Mr. Clyde is going to go along with a 50% cut to the Social Security workforce. I don’t know about you, but try and get help from the Social Security Administration now. Imagine what it will be like when only half the workforce is on the job!

We all want government to be more efficient and cost less, but when grandma or grandpa, wife or husband, can’t get help, and may possibly die, we will want our Representative to help, not hurt us.

Edward Wesson

Towns County Community Calendar

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|---|-------------------------|
| First Monday of each month: School Board... HS/MS Media Center | 6:45 pm |
| Every Tuesday: Storytime for Children... TC Library | 10:30 am |
| First Tuesday of each month: Hiaw. City Council... City Hall YH City Council... YH City Hall | 6 pm 6:30 pm |
| Second Wednesday of each month: Board of Elections... Elections Office | 4 pm |
| Third Monday of each month: Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse | 6 pm |
| Third Tuesday of each month: Commissioner’s Mtg... Courthouse City of Young Harris Planning Commission... Meeting Room in City Hall TC Water Authority Board Meeting | 5:30 pm 5 pm 6 pm |

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