

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Tackling Our Goals for 2025

By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher



Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger

As we enter 2025, a year full of potential and the promise of new beginnings, the world appears ready for transformation. A new administration is assuming power, the global stage is buzzing with fresh ambitions, and each of us possesses the ability to seize this moment. The beginning of a new year offers a chance to set bold goals and cultivate positivity, strength, ambition, and courage – essential qualities that drive us toward success and fulfillment.

It can be overwhelming and intimidating. However, let's not shy away from challenges. Doubt, fear, and uncertainty naturally accompany ambition. They remind us of our humanity but should never define us. This balance between fear and faith has resonated throughout history, perhaps most poignantly in the story of the Children of Israel on the brink of entering the Promised Land.

They had just witnessed the miraculous event of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, standing directly in the presence of the Divine. Poised at the edge of their ultimate destination, they were reassured that G-d would fight their battles and grant them victory. The future appeared bright, with the promise within reach.

Yet, fear took root. Acting on their own initiative, they sent scouts to the Land of Israel. These scouts returned with a devastating report that drained the courage from the people. They claimed the land was unconquerable. Their words were filled with despair: "We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are... we appeared like grasshoppers in our eyes, and that's how we appeared in their eyes."

Despite all they had seen and experienced, the Israelites succumbed to a collective case of low self-esteem. Their fear overshadowed their faith, and their hesitation led to profound consequences. God decreed that their entry into the Promised Land would be delayed by 39 years, ensuring that a new generation – unburdened by their parents' "slave mentality" – would inherit the land.

This delay was not just punishment but a necessary transformation. Faith, courage, and resilience needed time to take root within the people. Without these qualities, they could not fulfill their destiny.

Yet, as soon as the decree was issued, the Israelites experienced a dramatic change of heart. Fear transformed into determination. The very people who had been terrified moments earlier suddenly implored God to allow them to enter the Promised Land. They were ready to move forward, fearless, filled with the courage they had sorely lacked.

What sparked this turnaround? How could a people burdened by doubt one moment discover such determination the next?

The answer lies in awakening their inherent faith. Fear, no matter how overwhelming, is often temporary. It clouds our judgment and obscures the truth, but it cannot erase the courage that resides within us. For the Israelites, recognizing the consequences of their fear helped to reawaken their faith. They remembered who they were: a people chosen for greatness, under divine protection.

This story resonates deeply as we look ahead to the year before us. Fear and doubt will visit us all, especially as we embark on new ventures, face challenges, or strive for goals that feel just out of reach. However, these emotions are not our enemies; they present opportunities to tap into the faith and courage that already lie within us.

Overcoming fear begins with acknowledging it. The Israelites were not condemned for feeling afraid; fear is a natural response to the unknown. The problem arose when they allowed fear to control their actions and overshadow their faith. In our lives, we can make a different choice. When fear whispers that we are "grasshoppers" in a world of giants, we must remind ourselves of the truth: we are stronger, braver, and more capable than we realize.

Faith doesn't mean the absence of fear; it means acting in spite of it. It involves trusting in the vision of who we can become and taking steps toward that vision even when the path feels uncertain. Like the Israelites, we may stumble, but we can always rise again. Even in the face of doubt, the courage to move forward turns potential into reality.

So, as we welcome 2025, let us embrace its challenges and opportunities with positivity and let ambition guide our actions and courage steady our hearts with strength. The lessons of the past remind us that greatness is not achieved without struggle, but they also remind us that the seed of triumph lies within every struggle.

Be strong and of good courage. This year is yours to conquer.

Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer who supports communities throughout the regional South. You can contact them at y@tasteoftorah.org.

A HABITAT FOR HUMANITARIANS



No Matter How You Slice It

The forsythia bush by the driveway, the hopeful one that regularly sends out a few exploratory blossoms in December just to see, may finally be convinced that winter has arrived. We suspected as much. The hum of the electric meter has developed a tone that unconsciously stimulates my hand to reach protectively for my wallet. Ice forms on my morning coffee waiting for Dr. Poopenhouser, whose winter coat is apparently much better than mine, to finish his meticulous study of the best possible locations to conduct his morning constitutional.

Someone found out where all the long-range spaghetti models are kept, and now suddenly everyone on social media is an expert on the weather. It might snow this month, or the next. You know how excitable we have become now that every event is another piece of the falling sky. At home, we have a bag of flour and a bread machine, so there's no need to run to the grocery just yet.

Curious thing about sliced bread. It's supposed to be bad for you unless there's a possibility of a tenth of an inch of snow or more, and if you stuff it under your coat for insulation when threatened by those "real feel" temperatures, it can feel quite toasty. I'm grateful for the constant reminders that wind makes you feel colder, but my Buffalo girl is not impressed.

The impending doom caused by the inconvenient 23.5-degree tilt of the Northern Hemisphere away from the sun aside, we enter this new year with hope. Though I do not give credence to signs and omens, we bought a can of Pringles yesterday that was filled almost to the top. Surely that portends a good and prosperous year.

I'm hopeful that 2025 will mark the beginning of a long-awaited return in the direction of common sense and pragmatism. We just witnessed 1.5 billion votes across 73 nations cast against incumbents in an extraordinary rebuke to the status quo. This is far and away beyond the normal pendulum swing from left to right and back again. It is, generally speaking, a rejection of globalism, global war, and an awakening to the sinister sameness that has crept into many of the nations of the West.

Here in the US, the outgoing administration is busy trying to shore up what it sees as its legacy and sabotage the agenda of the incoming. That is to be expected. Historically, such efforts have ranged from the comical to the heinous. The outgoing Clinton administration removed all the "W" keys from every keyboard in the White House. The George W. Bush administration left office with a host of "midnight regulations" to thwart Obama. The first Trump administration exited with a flurry of executive orders, and several derogatory notes were left for incoming Biden staff to find.

The Biden administration, for its final act, chose to throw gasoline on the fire in Ukraine by authorizing the use of the Army Tactical Missile System, which prompted Russia to unleash its Oreshnik hypersonic missile, against which NATO has no reliable defense or counter, at least none they're willing to admit to having.

Some have accused Biden of "trying to start WWII," a claim which we dismiss. It is apparent even to his supporters that the President has not had a firm grip on the rudder for some time, and whoever is behind the curtain seeking to maintain power is surely not willing to commit global suicide in order to achieve that. We think it is more likely that the Ukraine escalation serves rather to bolster the arms race against Trump's talk of peace, which has earned him mortal enemies ever since he told the New York Times in 2016, "Wouldn't it be nice if we actually got along with Russia?"

Republicans and Democrats have long disagreed on environmental and energy policies, so we can't fault the outgoing administration for attempting to protect its agenda in those areas because Republicans have done exactly the same kind of maneuvering. However, taken with the direct escalation in Ukraine caused by the authorization of the ATMS, there are two things that reveal the character of the hand behind the curtain more than anything else I could imagine. First, the outgoing administration ended the policy which has been in place since WWII of prioritizing veterans in hiring for federal jobs to achieve a more "inclusive and diverse workforce." Curiously, the US military is already one of the most diverse organizations on the planet.

Second, and in a callous display of evil intent, the administration pressured Ukraine to draft 18-year-olds into the fray so that they, too, could contribute to the rising death toll of 43,000 Ukrainian, 3,000 North Korean, and 791,000 Russian troops. Thankfully for the future of the Ukrainian people, Zelensky rejected that proposal.

A quick check of the forecast, and I don't see any snowflakes in the 7-day. That tells me that the NWS predictions and the Facebook forecast have begun to diverge. However, if we do have to buy sliced bread to stay warm, we can take some consolation in the fact that not a single grain of Ukrainian wheat was sacrificed to make it.

We hope for peace. We hope for a humane and practical border policy. We hope for the merit of a republic over the equity of oligarchic socialism. We hope that a loaf of bread will be less expensive in the future.

We don't expect change to happen overnight. The world's largest economy does not turn on a dime. Like a large tanker or barge, it requires careful and precise steering miles ahead of its destination, and this boat has been headed for a collision for a long time. Like the crime numbers that were obscured during the election and then quietly revised, the truth of the economy will soon be revealed, and there will be impatience, disappointment, and anger. On our present course, the nation would be in the neighborhood of \$50 trillion in debt by 2028.

Expect the ideological battles to continue. True believers of any persuasion are not swayed by a popular vote, and there are zealots throughout Congress, the education system, mainstream media, and quite a few boardrooms who would rather see the policies and practices of the past 4 years continue.

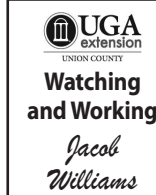
Business, however, unless it is a favored appendage of the administrative state, is always sensitive to that bottom line, which is extremely responsive to popular consent. (When is the last time you saw a Bud Light can on the side of the highway?) The incoming administration invites hope that a government can be run more like a business that wants to turn a profit. A business that wants to profit is guided by innovation and pragmatism over ideology, and that bodes well for the price of bread, no matter how you slice it.

Outside The Box

By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

Crape Myrtle Pruning

Crape myrtles are a very common tree that many people like to plant in their home landscape or you may see them lining roads in towns.



There are couple of reasons why crape myrtles make great landscape trees. The first is that they are very disease and insect resistant, as there are not too many pests that will bother them. Powdery mildew is the most serious disease issue that crape myrtle will usually have, and it rarely kills the tree. Ambrosia beetles will attack crape myrtles, but generally they only attack trees that are already dead, dying, or stressed. Crape myrtles also come with a variety of flower colors, making them very attractive. Finally, crape myrtles come

in a variety of sizes. Varieties range from dwarf to semi-dwarf to full size, meaning mature tree heights range from 3 to 30 feet tall.

Pruning is important for crape myrtles, because the blooms only form on new growth. Even more important is selecting the right sized variety for your location. If you select a variety that will grow to a good height for the spot where you're putting it, the pruning will not be difficult, because you won't be as concerned with managing the plant's size.

Now is a good time of year to prune your crape myrtles. Excessive pruning can lead to problems with disease and insects, because the tree is stressed. Bad pruning practices are called CRAPE MURDER. Crape murder generally involves topping the tree, or cutting back all the branches to 3 to 4 feet above the ground. This will result in an oddly shaped tree that produces a lot of suckers.

To properly prune a crape myrtle, start at the base of the tree and work your way up. You're looking for suckers, if you find them prune those off. Once you get to where the branches are, remove crossing branches. Crossing branches will rub against each other when the wind blows and create sites where disease and insects can get in. As the tree grows you can remove branches from the lower third of the tree. Removing those branches will expose the trunk character. Some people like to prune off the old seedheads. I think they're an attractive feature. With new growth in the spring the old seedheads will fall off. On some varieties of crape myrtles, you can prune in the summer after the bloom is spent to create another flush of flowers. A second bloom is difficult to force on varieties that bloom after mid-July.

A common misconception is that crape myrtles have to be pruned to produce flowers. This is not true. Pruning allows you to shape the tree. If you have a spot where the tree can grow and does not need shaping for space concerns, pruning is not necessary. I encourage everyone to do some research on finding the variety that will fit in the space that they have, because that will solve a lot of pruning issues before they arise. Pruning crape myrtles properly allows accentuates the natural beauty that they have.

If you have questions about crape myrtle pruning contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Letters to the Editor

Narrow and Broad Minded

Dear Editor,

In a world where broad-minded people are the majority and narrow-minded people are the minority, it's no wonder our world is so messed up with wrong thinking that Satan has introduced into the minds that entertain evil thoughts that will end in destruction if not dealt with. Being broad-minded is like a captain on a plane when he announces that the tower said it is OK to land on runway 2 but the captain said to his passengers, "I feel adventurous, so let's land on runway 3 and see what happens." That's not only broad-minded but totally careless on the captain's part to see that his plane lands on the right runway.

Likewise in the Bible Jesus warned the Jewish rulers not to be open minded about the message of salvation, but to come to a saving knowledge with a narrow-minded view; but their minds were set on old traditions which came down from their ancestors. They had the Messiah right in front of them, but they were blind-sighted in their ways that they missed the hope of eternal life that walked and talked among them. Even today millions of Jews and Gentiles are still open-minded of their own choosing.

Jesus warned the people in Matthew 7:13-24 – Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to eternal life with Christ, and only a few find it, because the majority are seeking worldly things, not heavenly things so they miss out on what God has in store for them, but they choose to follow the broad road of destruction which tickles Satan to no end. Narrow-minded believers in Christ will inherit heaven and all other open-minded people will inherit Hell. Just like the captain on the plane. Stay on the right runway and land safely in the arms of a Savior, Christ, Jesus.

Frank F. Combs

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:
Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor
P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546
Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net

Letters should be limited to 200 words or less, signed, dated and include a phone number for verification purposes. This paper reserves the right to edit letters to conform with Editorial page policy or refuse to print letters deemed pointless, potentially defamatory or in poor taste. Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc. Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.*

Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.

The Towns County Herald is an independent and non-partisan publication. As such, third-party views contained herein are not necessarily the opinions or positions of this newspaper, e.g. advertising, press releases, editorial content, perspectives expressed in articles covering local events, etc.

Towns County Community Calendar

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

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

Kenneth West
Owner/Publisher

Shawn Jarrard
General Manager/Editor

Todd Forrest
Staff Writer

Derek Richards
Advertising Director

Jordan Hyatt
Office Manager

Lowell Nicholson
Photographer

Publication No: 635540

Advertising, News deadlines: Friday at 5 p.m.

Towns County (1 Year) \$30. Out of County (1 Year) \$40. Entered as second-class matter on November 8, 1928, at the post office at Hiawassee, Georgia under Act of March 3, 1879. With additional mailing points. The Towns County Herald is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement. Postmaster: Send change of address to: Towns County Herald, P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546.

Office located at: 518 N. Main St. Suite 3 "The Mall", Hiawassee
Phone: (706) 896-4454 Fax: (706) 896-1745 Email: tcherald@windstream.net
Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546