

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Genuine Connections

How to Avoid Feeling Taken for Granted and Build Genuine Connections

By Yonatan Hamburger and Tzali Reicher

Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hamburger



Have you ever felt like you were giving so much in a relationship, yet receiving little in return?

You do, do, do for the other person, whether it's your partner, friend, or family member, but there's no acknowledgment, no gratitude, no recognition. It feels like you're just going through the motions, trying to make things work while the other person seems oblivious to your effort.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone – many of us experience this sense of imbalance in our relationships at some point or another.

Of course, this is not just a modern-day phenomenon. If we take a step back and consider ancient wisdom, particularly the teachings found in the Torah, we can find insights that are still relevant to how we approach our connections with others. A recurring theme emerges. The message is simple but profound: intentionality in relationships matters. And just as importantly, we need to recognize the difference between meaningful, committed love and a shallow, transactional relationship.

Take, for example, a passage in the book of Leviticus. In Chapter 26, G-d speaks to the Israelites, reminding them that everything in life is a gift from Him. He challenges them not to view the blessings in their lives as mere chance or coincidence but to understand them as intentional gifts. The text says: "If you... approach me with *keri*, I will respond with a fierce *keri*."

Now, *keri* is a Hebrew term that can be roughly translated to "happencance" or "coincidence." It is rarely used in the Torah, and in fact, appears only seven times, all in this section. In essence, G-d is warning us against approaching life with a mindset of randomness, as if our experiences are simply the result of luck or fate. This way of thinking reduces life to a series of isolated, disconnected events, where we see no meaning behind them, and we fail to recognize the deeper connections at play.

When we apply this lesson to relationships, it becomes clear that a relationship rooted in *keri* lacks depth and consistency. If you are constantly taking your partner, friend, or family member for granted – assuming that everything that happens between you is just a coincidence – you are, in a way, disengaging from the very essence of what it means to build a lasting, fulfilling connection. Relationships based on happenstance are unstable, unpredictable, and shallow. There's no real commitment, no intention behind the actions. It's all about what happens at the moment without consideration for the long-term bond you're trying to create.

To bring this into a more contemporary context, there's the old joke told about the fellow who's late for an important appointment, driving around the block for the umpteenth time looking for a parking space.

In desperation, he cries out to G-d, "If you give me a parking spot right now, I will make a large donation to charity!" Just as the words leave his lips, a spot becomes available, and he says, "Never mind, G-d. I got this one covered!"

The problem with this mindset is that it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. A person's lack of recognition of the Divine guiding Hand distances him from a deeper spiritual connection. Life is reduced to a series of random events governed by cause and effect rather than understanding that every moment – every green light, every obstacle, every bump in the road – can be a custom-sent message from God, meant to guide us, teach us, and grow us.

This is where spiritual sensitivity comes into play. Just as your phone must be turned on to receive a text message, your spirit must be tuned in to the messages G-d is sending you. If you're not open to receiving those messages – if you're too busy chalking up everything to chance – you miss out on the deeper lessons meant to be learned. And when you miss those messages, your relationship with your Creator, and with others, will remain distant and superficial.

So, how do we cultivate that spiritual sensitivity in our daily lives? It starts by slowing down and paying attention. One practical step is to take a few minutes each day to reflect on everything that has happened to you. Did you face any challenges? Did someone offer you unexpected kindness? Did something fall into place that seemed to happen just at the right time? Instead of brushing these things off as coincidence, try to see them as intentional moments sent your way, part of a greater plan designed to guide you.

In relationships, this kind of mindfulness is crucial. When you begin to view your interactions with others through the lens of intentionality, you stop taking things for granted. You begin to notice the little things – the way your partner listens to you, the effort a friend puts into staying in touch, or the patience your family member shows when you're feeling stressed. These may seem like small gestures, but when you view them as intentional acts of love and care, they take on a whole new meaning. And the more you recognize and express gratitude for these things, the more your relationships will deepen.

The wisdom from the Torah teaches us that nothing is by chance; everything has purpose and intention behind it. And if we embrace that mindset, not only will we deepen our relationship with our Creator, but we will also cultivate stronger, more meaningful connections with those around us. So, take a moment each day to reflect, to be grateful, and to engage intentionally in your relationships. You'll be surprised at how much richer and more fulfilling life becomes when you approach it with purpose and sensitivity.

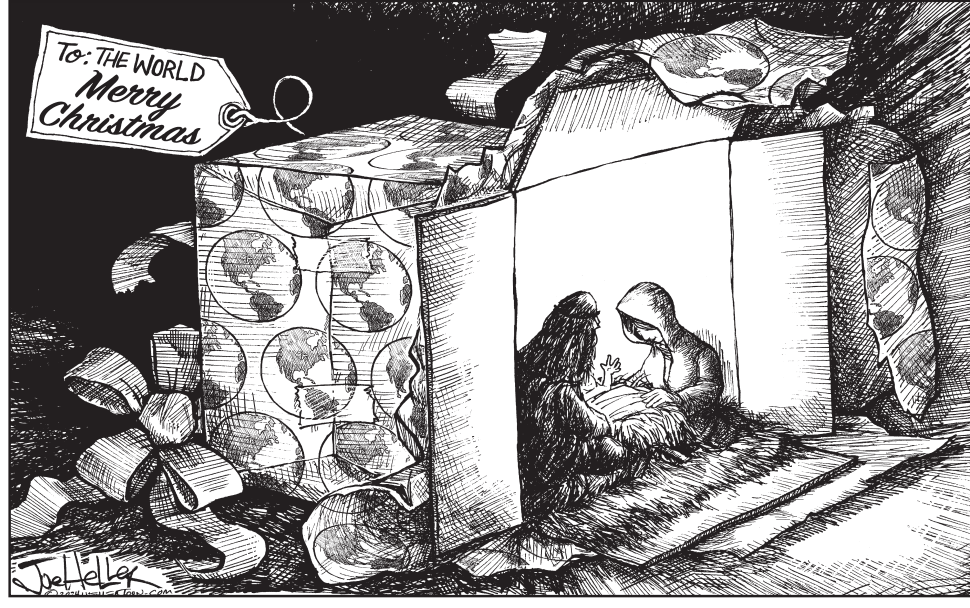
We wish you all of G-d's blessings during this holiday season, next year, and always!

Yonatan Hamburger is a rabbi and writer serving spiritual seekers of all persuasions on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer serving communities throughout the regional South. You can reach them at y@tasteoftorah.org.

Guest Columns

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper.

If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.



Like Dark Chocolate

Tracey and I treat ourselves to some really fine hot chocolate this time of year. It's the good stuff, not the hydrogenated high fructose off-the-shelf alkali powder.

We melt and stir and wait, and simply ignore the list of ingredients on the package of marshmallows.

Christmas is a bit like dark chocolate. The fellowship and good cheer, the decorations and music are sweet; the empty seats around the table can be bitter, especially if those seats were recently vacated.

Our table is small this year, but we are blessed with a crowded house of memories that still glows warmly after all these years. The bitter notes are blended to a fine flavor like the cup of good coffee sitting at my right hand.

An elderly friend once told me that for some, a bitter truth about holidays is that they remind us that the longer we survive, the more irrelevant we can become. It begins so gradually we hardly notice. The phone doesn't ring as often. There are no letters in the mailbox and the inbox is full of spam. Christmas greetings are sent by text.

If enough time passes, we begin to observe that no one wants to hear our stories anymore. They are told in a dead language about a world that no longer exists. We are a Christmas ornament to be celebrated briefly and then set aside, or a debt to be serviced. People look right through us as if we were transparent, and it seems like we gradually become invisible as we lose family and friends to time, geography, and life changes.

I'm still a young man, but enough water has passed under the bridge for me to begin suspecting, especially during Christmas, that perhaps the purpose of time is to perform the task of erasing the ego that we are either unable or unwilling to do ourselves. Underneath the decorations and the material spectacle that this season has become, is Christ reminding us that we are souls, after all, and what pleases the ego is rarely nourishing to the soul.

So here's what I want you to do this holiday season. Enjoy it to the fullest, and say out loud that for which you are grateful. Make some time to step outside the brightly decorated holiday box and speak to the elderly woman sitting alone at the restaurant. Sit with her for a while. Ask the Vietnam veteran coming out of the grocery about his hat, and listen to his story. Truly listen, looking him square in the face with both feet pointed in his direction, not with one shoe pointed toward the car confessing that you would rather be somewhere else.

Take a plate of warm leftovers to a neighbor's house, the one whose kids didn't come home for the holidays this year. Go ahead and call that aunt that you only talk to on Christmas, but this time keep her on the phone and ask her a lot of questions.

We can all celebrate again this year the privilege of living in these beautiful mountains, green valleys, and sheltered coves, and here is the best part: The acts of kindness and generosity I just mentioned are the very things that so many of you already do. That, above and beyond the scenery that decorates the hillsides, is why we love it here, and a merry Christmas to you all!



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

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Mistletoe

Around this time of year mistletoe is a popular decoration in people's homes. You'll see it hanging above doorways for use by romantically inclined couples. Nowadays you can buy plastic mistletoe at stores to put up in your house. Let's talk about the effect that mistletoe can have on trees in the nature.

UGA extension
LINDEN COUNTY
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



The origins of hanging mistletoe come from Norse mythology and Celtic Druids. According to Norse mythology the mistletoe berries brought the Norse god Baldur back to life.

You can find mistletoe outside on trees year-round as it is an evergreen plant. Usually in December it will become more noticeable because trees are bare after dropping their leaves. If you see a green bundle of leaves in the branches of tree around this time of year, chances are that it's mistletoe. In the plant world mistletoe is considered a parasitic plant. Mistletoe will send its root, called the haustorium, into the bark of a host tree. The mistletoe will take nutrients and water from the host tree.

Mistletoe is usually found in the southern United States, because it is susceptible to freezing temperatures, ranging from Virginia over to Texas and down to Florida. It can infect more than 105 different species of trees. Some trees often infected by mistletoe are maples, buckeyes, birch, hickory, oaks, and a whole bunch more.

Mistletoe can be shaded out by surrounding trees. Therefore, fast growing trees that can cover mistletoe from above will have success in preventing infection.

Mistletoe creates a draw for water and nutrients on the tree. Mistletoe will pull these things to itself away from the roots of the tree. This process can lead to a lot of stress on the tree, especially in a drought. Mistletoe tissue will have 1.6 times more nitrogen, 2.3 times more potassium, and 2.5 times more phosphorus than the host tree tissue. During times of drought mistletoe water and nutrient uptake from the tree will increase while the rest of the tree is in decline. Research has shown that moderately infected trees can have a 66% mortality rate after a severe drought period. Mistletoe is able to pull water from the tree more effectively than the tree can pull the water up from the ground.

Mistletoe infections can be very common. Trees that are taller than surrounding trees and trees that are not densely packed in with other trees are most likely to be infected. Infections will begin at the top of the tree and move downward and inward over time. Advanced symptoms on the tree of infection can be branch die-back, reduced tree growth, increased stress, and in massive infestations, tree death.

Early intervention is critical when dealing with mistletoe infection. If you simply remove the mistletoe shoot it will mostly likely grow back, so repeated removal would be necessary. Pruning tree branches that are infected is an effective method of removing mistletoe. Remove the branch at least 14 inches below the point of infection. Ethephon is a chemical application that is a plant growth regulator that can be used to control mistletoe. Whenever you apply any chemical, read the label before application.

Control of mistletoe on old and socially significant trees can be important. Having a mistletoe infection does not necessarily mean that death is imminent for a tree, but mistletoe can have an impact on the tree's ability to thrive. If you have any questions about mistletoe contact your local Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Letters to the Editor

The Perfect Christmas Gift

Dear Editor,

As we approach Christmas Day when many folks celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who came down from His glorious throne of grace to be born of a virgin girl named Mary and laid in a manger in a stable, I have gotten to pondering that God could have come down as a fully grown man of 30 years old and arrived in style riding in a chariot with an army of angels at His beck and call if there was any trouble a-brewing in Bethlehem. Jesus could have danced his way to Rome to tell Herod that he was no longer in charge of anything, that God required his soul that very night. Jesus could have set Himself up as King over all for peace on earth to reign forever. A happy ending, like a Cinderella story.

God had a perfect plan in place when He humbled Himself lowly to be born and laid in a manger surrounded by various animals, shepherds, angels and later wise men, who came seeking the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, helpless as a babe but still God full of love and grace. Jesus came into this world born among the poor, not the rich and famous, not of any notability, but a humble servant that one day would save the world from its sin.

Yes, the birth of baby Jesus has stood the test of time, and down through the ages, millions of people continue to receive Him as their personal Savior who will one day come back from heaven and make everything right, and there will be peace on a new earth and a new heaven.

If you don't know Jesus as your Savior, what a wonderful Christmas gift it would be if you would receive Him into your heart. He's waiting for you to believe upon His Name and become a child of God, your only hope of living in heaven when He returns.

Frank F. Combs

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

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Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net

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

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