

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Modern Life

The Hidden Weight of Modern Life
By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher



Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger

Every morning, Sarah stands in front of her closet, overwhelmed by choices yet feeling she has "nothing to wear." Down the street, Mike checks his phone dozens of times an hour, each notification bringing a brief dopamine rush followed by an empty feeling. At a local diner, Ellen obsesses over every calorie, turning what should be a pleasant meal with friends into an exercise in anxiety.

These aren't extraordinary people with extraordinary problems. They're our neighbors, our colleagues, our friends – regular folks struggling with the subtle yet powerful forces that turn everyday life into a source of constant stress.

We see it in the parent who works overtime to buy their children the latest sneakers, not because the old ones are worn out, but because peer pressure has turned basic items into status symbols. We see it in the retiree who sits alone in their apartment, scrolling endlessly through social media instead of joining the community center activities down the street – not because they can't afford it (it's free), but because they've become more comfortable with virtual connections than real ones.

Even the simplest activities have become complicated by modern pressures. A family dinner becomes a photo opportunity before anyone can take a bite. A walk in the park is interrupted by constant checks for work emails. A child's school performance becomes a referendum on their entire future. These aren't luxuries we're talking about – these are basic elements of daily life that have somehow become sources of anxiety and competition.

The ancient wisdom of the Torah speaks directly to this modern condition. In one particularly relevant teaching derived from the Book of Numbers (Chapter 33:52), Moses instructs the people about entering their Promised Land, warning them to destroy all remnants of idol worship, even the most subtle forms left by previous inhabitants. The Hebrew word for idolatry translates to "foreign servitude" – a concept that takes on new meaning in our current age. Today, this servitude shows up not as idols of clay but in our obsessive relationships with social media, our endless pursuit of approval, and our attachment to artificial standards of success.

Life's choices generally fall into three categories: things that uplift us, things that harm us, and the vast middle ground of neutral activities that could go either way. It's this middle ground where most of us live our daily lives, and where we have the greatest opportunity for transformation.

A load of laundry becomes meaningful when done with gratitude for having clothes and the means to clean them. A bus ride to work becomes an opportunity for a kind word with a stranger. Even standing in line at the grocery store can become a moment of patience and human connection rather than frustration.

This isn't about adding more to already full plates or spending money people don't have. It's about changing how we approach what we already do. The parent rushing through bedtime stories can turn off their phone and make it a moment of real connection. An elderly person watching TV alone can invite a neighbor to share their favorite shows. The office worker eating lunch at their desk can step outside and share their break time with colleagues.

Something remarkable happens when we learn to shift our focus from constant acquisition and comparison to appreciation and connection. The internal conflicts that drain so many people – physically, mentally, and emotionally – begin to fade. What emerges is a kind of peace that doesn't depend on what we own or achieve but on how we choose to live each moment.

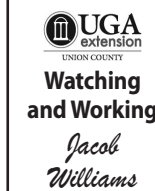
This isn't about dramatic lifestyle changes or grand gestures. It's about small shifts in how we approach our daily lives. It's about recognizing that true satisfaction doesn't come from serving the modern idols of status, appearance, or social media metrics but from living with purpose and connection, no matter how humble our circumstances might be.

Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds and beliefs 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@tasteof Torah.org.



Plant It?

When to plant? That is a big question. We are still a ways off from warmer weather. However, that doesn't mean that we can't start thinking about the garden. Winter is a great time to go ahead and start planning your garden and picking up seeds. Let's talk a bit about planting calendars and when to get started on that garden.



UGA extension
UNION COUNTY
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams

Soil temperature should be our guide for when we plant. Ideally, for warm season vegetables we want the soil temperature to be at least 65 degrees. Some examples of warm season vegetables are tomatoes, peppers, squash, and okra. Cool season vegetables can be planted when soil temperatures have reached 50 degrees. Some ex-

amples of those are radishes, cabbage, collards, and kale.

Some crops like carrots, parsnips, beets, radish, turnips, and mustard do better from seed. However, for most other vegetables using transplants is a great way for your garden to get a head start. There are a few benefits to using transplants. One is spacing. Not every seed that you plant is going to come up. For most plants if we have good quality seed we hope to get at least 85% germination. If you space out the seeds in your garden and some of them don't germinate you'll have wasted space. Using transplants, you know that you'll have a live plant in every spot. Another reason is for weed control. A transplant that is already up and growing with a developed root system will be able to compete against weeds for sunlight, water, and nutrients better than a plant growing from seed. You'll also put yourself a little ahead of the game.

There are two ways to get transplants. The first is the easiest. Go to one of the garden centers or nurseries around here and buy them. The second option is to grow them yourself. This is not too difficult to do, and it gives you a fun project to do inside while it's still cold outside. The things that you'll need are seeds, growing media, and a grow container or tray. Fill the container with the grow media (a mixture of peat moss, sand, and loamy soil). Place one or two seeds in each cell of the tray, and then cover it very lightly with a little bit of soil. The timing of seeding is important. Tomatoes take 5 to 7 weeks before they're ready. Squash only takes 2 to 3. Peppers take 7 to 9 weeks. So pick your target planting date and back up from there to determine when you need to start transplants. I usually recommend planting outside in mid-May for warm season vegetables. Most seeds will need to be at least 70 degrees to germinate. You can purchase a heating pad to put your seed trays on to reach this temperature. Once the plant has germinated, you will need a way to provide light for it. A south facing window won't provide enough light, and will need to be supplemented. Supplement with a fluorescent or LEDs. Leave the bulbs on for 16 hours a day. You can plug the light into a timer to help keep track.

If you have questions about when to plant or starting your own plants you can contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Letters to the Editor

Broken Hallelujahs

Dear Editor,

The highway of life has some good stretches, and some, not so good. An occasional pothole, a sharp curve or an extremely difficult hill to climb are seemingly built into our travels. A friend of mine, who was going through a very difficult trial in his life, remarked, "I'm mad at God." He didn't know it, and I didn't either, but things would get a lot worse. Leonard Cohen's song, "Hallelujah," has lyrics that declare God hears our broken hallelujahs. Scripture tells us God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in times of trouble. He will not leave us without comfort and will respond to our broken hallelujahs. Psalm 30:10 tells us, "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord, be my helper." While we would rather not have trials or difficult times, it's those times that strengthen our faith and draw us closer to the Lord.

Gene Vickers

Baby to Adulthood

Dear Editor,

We have all heard the saying: Baby needs a new pair of shoes. And it is true as well that baby needs a bottle of milk at various times of the day and night, but imagine this same baby now is 12 years old and still asking to be fed by a bottle and a pacifier on the side. We all know this would be unimaginable to even comprehend. I give this example to bring up people who have attended Bible studies and are long-time members of a local church, and when they started out as a born-again believer everything was new to them – they were fed the Gospel message weekly just like an infant being fed milk. But somewhere down the line they never grew in their knowledge and faith through all the years they attended church. They still craved just the milk of the word, not the meat of God's Holy Word.

Pastors, elders, deacons and Sunday church teachers have an awesome task of feeding God's people that will bring out the best in them, but the folks who sit under these church leaders and teachers have the responsibility of growing in their faith and trust in God's glorious grace. It's like the old story about a horse. You can lead a horse to water, but they must partake of it themselves to quench their thirst, just like a believer in Christ must partake of God's word and apply it to their daily routine. You can only receive God's Word into your heart when you truly thirst for it. What you take in will come out to be a blessing from God.

When we stop learning about who God is, then we can be like a dry thirsty desert longing for the living water that flows from the grace of God. Some folks have their fire insurance, and they are content to learn no more, which I am sure displeases God, but He still loves them the same.

Frank F. Combs

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.

Digital DNA

It was a week of rebellion. My smartphone was banished to the shop, forgotten in the car, deprived of its charging station, and left unattended. The revolt began when I noticed the weight of a certain cardboard box on a shelf, the one which contains several pounds of old cell phones.

Tinkerers will understand the reason for that box. One old phone controls my Chinese-manufactured drone without sharing our life story with the PLA. One functions as a music box. One subs for the TV remote when it hides between the sofa cushions. Still, this is quite a collection for someone who has warily stalked the fringes of digital dependence like a stray dog drawn to the light of a campfire and the smell of burnt hot dogs. I'm confident that Tracey and I do not approach the 2,555 hours per year of digital exposure endured by the average American (and that number is higher for younger generations). Nevertheless, there is a lot of time, not to mention a lot of money represented in that box.

We are what we did, and we become what we do. Not only that, our descendants become what we did. Epigenetic changes are like turning switches on or off in your DNA. They involve chemical modifications that affect gene activity and expression. Imagine genes as light bulbs. Epigenetic changes can dim, brighten, or completely turn off certain bulbs without rewiring the house. These modifications can be influenced by various factors such as stress, diet, and environmental exposures, and some of these changes can be passed down to future generations.

In the brave new world of epigenetics, scientists have unveiled the intricate ballet of chemical modifications that regulate gene expression. It's a bit like updating software without changing the hardware. Environmental factors, lifestyle choices, and yes, even our cherished digital habits, can flip these epigenetic switches, leaving lasting imprints on our genetic legacy. And oh, what a legacy we're leaving!

Let's start with the glamorous blue light that emanates from our beloved screens. While it paints our faces in an ethereal glow during those late-night Netflix binges, it's also disrupting our circadian rhythms, leading to sleep disturbances. Epigenetic changes influenced by sleep patterns are linked to metabolic functions, stress responses, and even cognitive abilities. So, while we scroll through endless feeds and respond to ceaseless notifications, our epigenetic makeup is diligently recording our sleep-deprived exploits, ensuring our progeny inherit a propensity for insomnia and the accompanying brain fog. Sweet dreams, future generations!

Stress, our ever-present companion, has found a new ally in our digital devices. The constant influx of notifications, social media comparisons, and digital multitasking has left us all on edge. Adding to this are the marketing of fear and anger, as well as the divisive influence of manufactured consent. This chronic digital stress can alter our DNA methylation patterns, potentially leading to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Imagine our descendants navigating the world with an inherited predisposition for anxiety, a consequence of our relentless pursuit of digital validation. A legacy of digital age anxiety – now that is a hashtag-worthy inheritance!

But wait, there's more! Our sedentary screen-bound lifestyles are replete with opportunities for epigenetic mischief. Lack of physical activity can lead to changes in histone modifications, influencing genes related to obesity, cardiovascular health, and even longevity. So, while we enjoy our binge-watching marathons and endless gaming sessions, our genes are busy memorializing these sedentary habits. Our descendants may find themselves grappling with metabolic disorders and health challenges, all while wondering why great-great-grandma couldn't just put down the remote.

Now, let's talk about cognitive functions. Our digital dependence has us flitting between apps, tabs, and screens with the attention span of a goldfish. This constant digital bombardment can lead to diminished executive functions, such as problem-solving, impulse control, and emotional regulation. The epigenetic changes spurred by these habits can be passed down, making it more challenging for future generations to focus, learn, and regulate emotions. Picture a future where our descendants struggle with attention spans and memory, all thanks to our obsession with digital multitasking. A digital age gift that keeps on giving!

Ironically, our efforts to stay connected in the digital realm might also be degrading our real-world social skills. The overreliance on digital communication could be altering the epigenetic markers associated with social behaviors and interpersonal interactions. (Have you seen the family at the restaurant who aren't saying a word because everyone is engaged with their phone?) Fast forward to a future where our descendants find it hard to engage in meaningful face-to-face conversations, preferring the safety of screens over the complexities of human interactions. An epigenetic twist of fate, ensuring our digital legacy lives on in their social awkwardness.

And what about our children's children's children, you ask? Will they look back upon our era with gratitude for the digital epigenetic heirlooms we've bequeathed? Perhaps not. They might find themselves grappling with the unintended consequences of our digital indulgence, navigating a world where epigenetic changes shape their health, cognition, and social interactions in ways we could never have predicted.

In our quest for digital gratification, we've unwittingly become pioneers of an epigenetic revolution. Our digital habits are sculpting a genetic narrative for future generations, one marked by sleep disturbances, anxiety, metabolic challenges, cognitive difficulties, and social quirks. The irony of it all lies in the fact that while we strive to leave behind a technological legacy, our true legacy might be inscribed in the very genes of our descendants.

Perhaps the inadequacies and challenges we bequeath to our future generations will be compensated by another legacy we leave behind, as the last generations alive who remember the time before artificial intelligence, but that's a conversation for another day.

Outside The Box

By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

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 6 pm
YH City Council... YH City Hall 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 5:30 pm
City of Young Harris Planning Commission... Meeting Room in City Hall 5 pm
TC Water Authority Board Meeting 6 pm

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

Kenneth West
Owner/Publisher

Shawn Jarrard
General Manager/Editor

Derek Richards
Advertising Director

Jordan Hyatt
Office Manager

Todd Forrest
Staff Writer

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 Hiawasse, 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, Hiawasse, GA 30546.

Office located at: 518 N. Main St. Suite 3 "The Mall", Hiawasse

Phone: (706) 896-4454 Fax: (706) 896-1745 Email: tcherald@windstream.net

Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawasse, GA 30546