

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

... A Divine Appointment

Each Encounter,
A Divine Appointment
By Yonatan Hambourger
and Tzali Reicher



Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger

We all face moments that test our capacity for forgiveness. Sometimes it's small stuff – a friend forgetting your birthday or a coworker taking credit for your work. But what about when the betrayal cuts deeper? When it comes from those who should love you most?

Consider this scenario: You're seventeen, full of dreams and potential. Your siblings, consumed by jealousy, first plot your murder. They settle instead for selling you into slavery in a foreign land. Years pass as you endure hardship after hardship, yet somehow you rise above it all, building a life of remarkable success and influence.

Then fate delivers an unexpected twist. Your family, now struggling to survive, needs your help. They don't recognize you in your position of power, but you see them clearly. The same siblings who once plotted your demise now stand before you, desperate and vulnerable.

Most of us would struggle with what to do next. The urge for revenge would be tempting – after all, they deserve it, right? This is where the wisdom of Joseph, from the Torah, offers a surprisingly modern perspective on handling betrayal and maintaining our moral compass.

After being sold into slavery in Egypt, Joseph had endured false accusations, imprisonment, and years of hardship. Yet through his wisdom and G-d-given abilities, he rose to become second-in-command to Pharaoh himself. When his brothers came to Egypt seeking food during a famine, rather than exact revenge, Joseph's response wasn't what most would expect. Instead of anger or righteous vengeance, he said something remarkable (Genesis 44:5-7), "Do not be upset with yourselves that you sold me here, for G-d sent me ahead of you to provide sustenance for you."

This wasn't just about forgiveness – it revealed a profound understanding of how to live with purpose rather than resentment. Joseph's perspective challenges our natural inclinations toward grudges and retribution. He saw beyond the immediate pain and recognized a larger purpose at work. More importantly, he understood a fundamental truth: every event, no matter how seemingly insignificant or negative, is divinely orchestrated for a greater good.

Think about how this applies in our modern world. A forced early retirement might lead to discovering a new calling. A health setback could inspire you to help others facing similar challenges. Even family estrangements, as painful as they can be, might guide us toward becoming the bridge that helps heal other divided families. And yes, even life's daily frustrations – being stuck in traffic, or waiting in a long check-out line – are opportunities in disguise, moments deliberately placed in our path for a deeper purpose we might not yet understand.

This isn't about dismissing wrongdoing or pretending harm doesn't exist. Joseph's brothers made their choices freely and bore responsibility for their actions. But Joseph's genius lay in understanding that their accountability was between them and G-d. He refused to let their actions define his path forward or corrupt his character with bitterness.

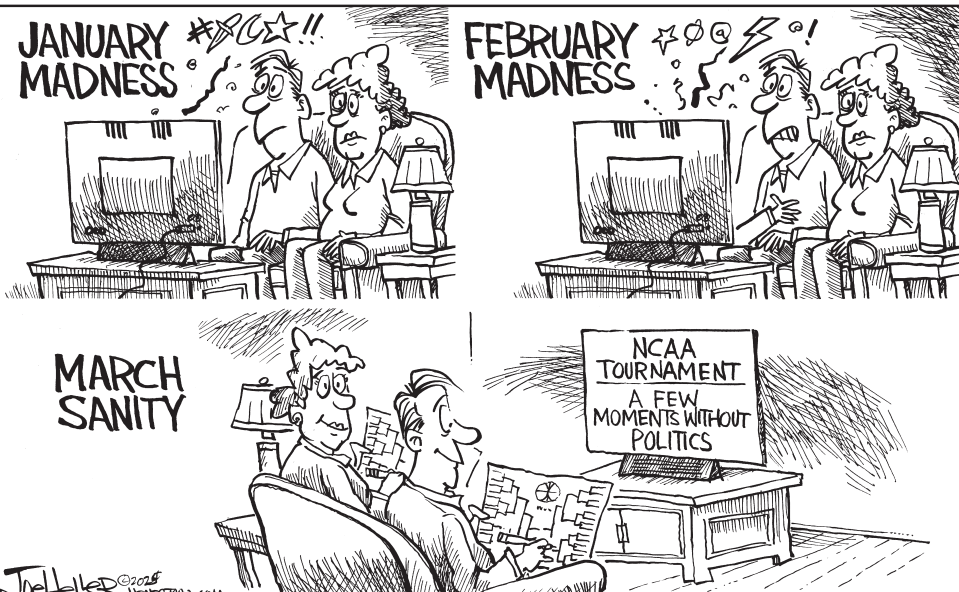
It's worth noting that Joseph's approach wasn't passive or weak. He maintained healthy boundaries and tested his brothers' character before fully reconciling. But he never lost sight of what mattered most – fulfilling his purpose rather than settling scores.

This wisdom speaks to all who ponder life's deeper meaning, from the most steadfast believer to those simply seeking practical guidance for life's challenges. When we stop keeping score of others' wrongs, we free ourselves to focus on what truly matters: brightening the lives of those we meet, finding opportunities to help others grow, and transforming our daily encounters into moments of meaning and purpose.

Every interaction holds within it a spark of the divine – a chance to repair a small corner of creation. That frustrating conversation with a stranger might be your opportunity to practice patience. The person who cuts you off in traffic could be your invitation to respond with grace. Even waiting in line becomes sacred when we view it as a divine appointment, perfectly orchestrated for purposes we may never fully understand.

The path forward unfolds naturally when we embrace this perspective. Each smile we share, each moment of patience we exhibit, each small kindness we extend – these aren't just good deeds, they're brushstrokes in G-d's master plan. Through these seemingly ordinary acts, we fulfill our extraordinary purpose: to illuminate the world, one soul at a time.

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.



Taking Care of Our Own

As a little boy, my Dad emphasized the importance of taking care of your own family. I never fought with my sister or brother. I was taught that I should look after them. Both my sister, Debbie, and my brother, Stacy, were younger than I, and Dad said to always stick up for the family no matter who was at fault. I am sure this was passed down from each preceding generation in our family.

Family members were precious in the isolated communities of Appalachia, which included Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina and Tennessee. Just as our talk is funny sounding to some people, our actions are considered strange to some people. But, you must remember there are reasons for these peculiarities. For example, my grandfather used the word "help" as a form of help. I thought this was peculiar for years but, that is the same type of language used by Chaucer in his day. The reasoning as to why the word has survived all this time stemmed from the fact that the people which lived in Appalachia were isolated from the rest of the world, and many of the old-world words survived because of that isolation.

Another example of peculiarities in my family is what some people call clannish. People in my family are clannish. They take care of each other. In other words, if you have a problem with one of them, then you have a problem with all of us. Charlie Baker was my mother's grandfather. His family was a tightly knit family which was composed of 10-15 siblings. The family was hard working. Many of them owned sawmills or worked in the logging woods.

Charlie's youngest sister married a fellow of questionable reputation. The young man liked to drink, and when drinking, he became mean and cantankerous. He was easy to get riled and loved to fight. By the time he was 25, Zed was regarded as one of the toughest men around Ray Mountain. When Zed and Sue first married they were hopelessly in love. But, hard work and drinking soured Zed. The farther his attitude sank, the more Zed drank. A few weeks after their fourth child was born, Zed and Sue quarreled over his drinking. Zed lost his temper and struck Sue in the face and on her head many times. Zed left Sue lying on the floor, unconscious and bleeding. Late that evening, her sister came for a visit and found her battered sister still on the floor.

Later that evening word got around to the brothers about what had happened to their sister. The boys all met at their Dad's house. After supper they waited until dark and then slipped down to the local bootlegger's place. The Baker brothers knew that Zed had been drinking all day. The eight brothers slowly surrounded the still and raised their guns. My great-grandfather, Dad Baker, was the leader. So, he called out to his brother-in-law, "Zed, come out of there. I aim to talk with you." The drunk-en young man staggered out from the still house with his hands on his head. The brothers tied him with leather thongs and forced him to walk 3 miles back to Dad's home place at Gray Rock.

Although she never told me, I am pretty sure my Grandmother knew the man was black and blue before the boys got him home. Upon reaching the home place they locked the young man up in a corn crib made of chestnut logs. He stayed locked up in that corn crib for 21 days and was fed nothing but corn bread and water.

Many years later I asked my grandmother why hadn't the police been called? Grand maw said, "Back then the law wouldn't come to Ray Mountain. So, we took care of our own." So, the next time you hear someone say the people of Appalachia are clannish or they talk funny, remember there is a reason for our funny talk.



Around The Farm
Mickey Cummings

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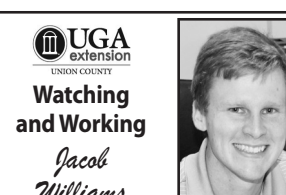
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Hemlock Woolly Adelgid

Have you seen small white cottony balls on hemlock trees? If you have then that means those trees are infested with Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). Let's look at why it's important to preserve hemlocks, what is the pest that is killing them, and what you can do to save them. We are getting to the time of year when they really start to come out.



UGA Extension
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams

Hemlocks are a native species that ranges from Maine to Northern Georgia. They are a keystone species that provides habitat for about 120 species of vertebrates and over 90 species of birds. Hemlocks are unique in their ability to thrive in shade. This attribute makes them common in ravines and along rivers and streams.

Their proximity to streams and rivers means that they are crucial in reducing erosion and watershed protection. Hemlocks can be identified by their needles. They have short flat needles with two distinctive pale white stripes on the underside. The needles are wider at the base and taper to a rounded tip, unlike firs that have parallel sides the whole way down.

HWA is a very small insect. The white cottony sacks on the hemlock trees are what the HWA wraps itself with for protection. They are an invasive species from Asia that doesn't have a natural predator here. HWA feeds on the sap inside of hemlock trees. Wind, birds, deer, or humans can spread the HWA. Once a tree has become infested, it will die within four to 10 years. Therefore, it is important to treat trees as after finding that they have been infected.

It is important to treat your own trees with cultural and chemical controls. Cultural controls include keeping hemlocks well mulched and watered. Hemlock trees don't have very deep roots and droughts can make them more susceptible to infection. Don't place any bird feeders or deer feeders near your trees. Birds and deer can carry the eggs for long distances. If you are hiking in an area that has HWA wash your clothes afterward because you may be carrying eggs. Be careful to not over-fertilize your trees as that could make them more enticing to HWA. Cultural controls may keep your trees healthy, but when they become infested, chemical controls are the only option. Chemical controls involve treating your tree with either Imidacloprid or Dinotefuran, and is the most common and effective method of control. An imidacloprid treatment will last four or five years. However, it may take one year before it is effective. Dinotefuran will last for two years in the tree and will take about four to six weeks to take effect. The ideal way to apply either of these insecticides is by soil drench. Putting the insecticide in the soil will mean quicker uptake by the plant and reduce the chance of off target drift. A soil drench does not require any special equipment. Soil injection can also be used; however, I only recommend using an injector if you are treating a large number of trees. Soil injection and soil drench are equally effective. You can also purchase imidacloprid in tablet form, so you don't have to mix with water. If the trees are near open water, a trunk injection of insecticide is necessary, which will require a professional. Whenever applying a pesticide follow the label.

The Union County Extension Office has a soil injector that is available to be checked out. Checking it out requires a \$250-dollar deposit that will be returned when the injector is brought back. If you would like instructions on how to treat hemlock trees contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu. The organization Save Georgia's Hemlocks have a website that also has lots of information.

Contact your local Extension Office or send me an email at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu if you have any questions about HWA.

Mental Floss

There is a skiff of snow on the ground this morning. It's an expression used by my grandparents that originated long ago in Scotland. The skiff, sometimes spelled "skift," refers to a light dusting of snow that barely covers the ground, and on this cold and windy morning, my budding peach trees are beginning to wonder if they were perhaps too eager to greet the spring. The collards, cabbage, and 7 Top, however, are quite content with the weather, and a flash-frozen jonquil is quite beautiful until it thaws out.

I'm grateful for the hum of the heating system and the warm puppy thawing my toes. A few days ago we were without power for an entire day while crews from the EMC worked diligently to repair the damage as the storm front passed through. Isn't it remarkable how quiet it gets when the power goes out? Gone are all the clicks, buzzes and whirs that accompany us throughout the day, just below the threshold of awareness.

Also missing is the background buzz of actors and professional talkers, and the whining cacophony of that noise behind the eyes from broken news and opinions about opinions. The silver lining behind every power outage is the opportunity for what Frank Zappa called "mental floss." It's a chance to clean out some of the mental and spiritual plaque that accumulates from an unhealthy diet of information loaded with emotional high-fructose corn syrup and trans fats.

We were certainly forewarned about the storm. Ten days out, the models started popping up on social media, and the now-customary frenzy of forwarding and reposting commenced. While technology has made us significantly safer because of advanced warnings and the ability to rapidly disseminate vital information, the competition for our attention through dramatic language and images can become a fear factory that creates panic for some and desensitization for others.

"Earth's Rotation Plunges All of North America Into Darkness." "Be sure to download the Channel 39 Weather App for the latest updates throughout the night!" Our bodies may be statistically safer now than they were in the days of weather predictions from the morning newspaper and warnings from the radio, but we pay for that safety with a tax on our peace of mind.

The good news is that mental floss is available whenever we need it, and on that note, it's time for a brisk walk to admire the sparkling canvas painted by the first rays of sunlight peeking over the mountain.

Letters to the Editor

A True Asset

Towns County Commissioner and Citizens,
I commend Eric Barrett and his team at the Clerk of Superior Court's Office for their outstanding service. Their help went beyond simply providing documents; they demonstrated exceptional kindness, understanding, and commitment to assisting me. Even working into their lunch hour! Their dedication is a true asset to Towns County.
Sincerely,
Ron and Kim Clark

A Terrible Idea

Dear Editor,
Abolishing the U.S. Department of Education is a terrible idea. Eliminating the department will devastate students, teachers and families across the country.

The Department of Education is responsible for overseeing federal student loan programs, enforcing civil rights protections, and ensuring low-income students receive the resources they need. Without it, millions of students will be left behind.

Public education should be a right for everyone, not a privilege for the wealthy. The Department of Education ensures that students with disabilities receive proper support, that Title IX protections remain in place, and that federal funding reaches the schools and students who need it most. Eliminating it will be a catastrophic mistake.

It's important for all of us to contact Senators Ossoff and Warnock and Representative Clyde to ask that they vote against eliminating the Department of Education. It is crucial for our children.
Thank you,
Michelle Maloney

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

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