

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Second Chances:

*Second Chances:
Finding Your Way
Back Home*

By Yonatan Hambourger
and Tzali Reicher

Johnny Cash once said, “You build on failure. You use it as a stepping stone.” The legendary musician knew this truth intimately. Before becoming the “Man in Black” beloved by millions, he battled severe drug addiction, destroyed his first marriage, and nearly ended his career. Yet through faith and determination, he found his way back, becoming not just a country music icon but a powerful symbol of redemption.

Consider Chuck Colson, once known as President Nixon’s “hatchet man” during the Watergate scandal. After serving time in federal prison, this former White House counsel could have disappeared into obscurity, crushed by shame and public disgrace. Instead, he founded Prison Fellowship, the world’s largest Christian nonprofit serving prisoners, becoming one of the most influential evangelical leaders of our time and touching millions of lives.

These transformations aren’t just stories of career comebacks – they’re testimonies to the power of genuine redemption. For every public figure who found their way back from the abyss, there are countless others whose stories never make headlines but are equally miraculous.

Take Michael, who spent decades building a successful family business, only to betray his brother’s trust by secretly diverting company funds for his own ventures. When discovered, he lost not just the business, but his relationship with his siblings and his standing in the community. The shame drove him away from his faith entirely. For years, he couldn’t even walk into a church, convinced he was beyond forgiveness. Today, after a long journey of repentance and reconciliation, he and his brother run the business together, their relationship stronger than ever, their story a testament to the power of forgiveness.

Or consider Rachel, who grew up in a devout household but turned away from her faith during college. She spent fifteen years actively mocking believers, including her own family, and taking pride in what she called her “liberation” from religious constraints. But an unexpected crisis left her feeling empty and searching for meaning. Even after she felt the stirring to return to faith, shame kept her away – how could she face the same community she had so publicly rejected? Yet when she finally found the courage to return, she discovered welcome rather than judgment, grace rather than condemnation.

This pattern of divine mercy isn’t a modern phenomenon. In fact, it’s deeply rooted in biblical truth. The Book of Numbers tells us of the Second Passover, a remarkable institution that speaks directly to G-d’s infinite capacity for giving second chances. When Moses excused some members of his flock from celebrating the first Passover in the desert because they were fulfilling another divine precept, they could have simply accepted their exemption. Instead, they pleaded for another opportunity to observe Passover, even though they were fully excused. Their persistence was extraordinary – they weren’t satisfied with a valid exemption but yearned for the chance to fulfill this sacred obligation. In response, G-d not only granted their request but established for all generations a permanent “second chance” to observe this holy day, exactly one month after the traditional Passover observance.

The profound message here isn’t just about making up for a missed ceremony. It’s about G-d’s eternal promise that no matter how far we’ve strayed, no matter how deliberately we’ve turned away, the door to return remains open. Even if we’ve willfully walked away from our faith, betrayed those who trusted us, or chosen darkness over light, the path home remains lit.

Some might say, “But you don’t understand how badly I’ve messed up.” Yet the very institution of the Second Passover teaches us that there’s no such thing as “too far gone” in G-d’s eyes. This divine gift wasn’t just for those who had legitimate reasons for missing the first Passover – it was established for all time, for anyone who needed a second chance, regardless of their reasons for straying.

This isn’t about making excuses for our past actions. Chuck Colson had to face the full weight of his misdeeds before his transformation could begin. Michael had to acknowledge the depth of his betrayal before reconciliation with his brother was possible. Rachel had to confront the pain she’d caused before she could fully embrace her return to faith. But each of them discovered that genuine repentance opens doors they thought were forever closed.

The road back isn’t always easy. It requires humility to admit our wrongs, courage to face those we’ve hurt, and faith to believe that redemption is possible. But the Second Passover stands as an eternal testament that G-d’s patience extends far beyond our human understanding. He doesn’t just tolerate our return – He celebrates it, establishing permanent pathways for us to find our way back to Him.

Even if this message doesn’t apply to you, perhaps you know someone – a friend, a family member, a colleague – who feels they’ve exhausted all their chances. Maybe they’ve betrayed sacred trusts, turned their back on everything they once held dear, or strayed so far from their values that they can’t imagine finding their way back. Share with them this eternal truth: as long as they’re drawing breath, it’s not too late to begin again.

In G-d’s infinite wisdom and mercy, there is no expiration date on redemption. Every moment carries the potential for transformation, every day offers the precious gift of a new beginning. The Second Passover teaches us that G-d’s capacity for giving second chances is limitless – He built it into the very fabric of His law. The only question that remains is: Are you ready to take that first step home?

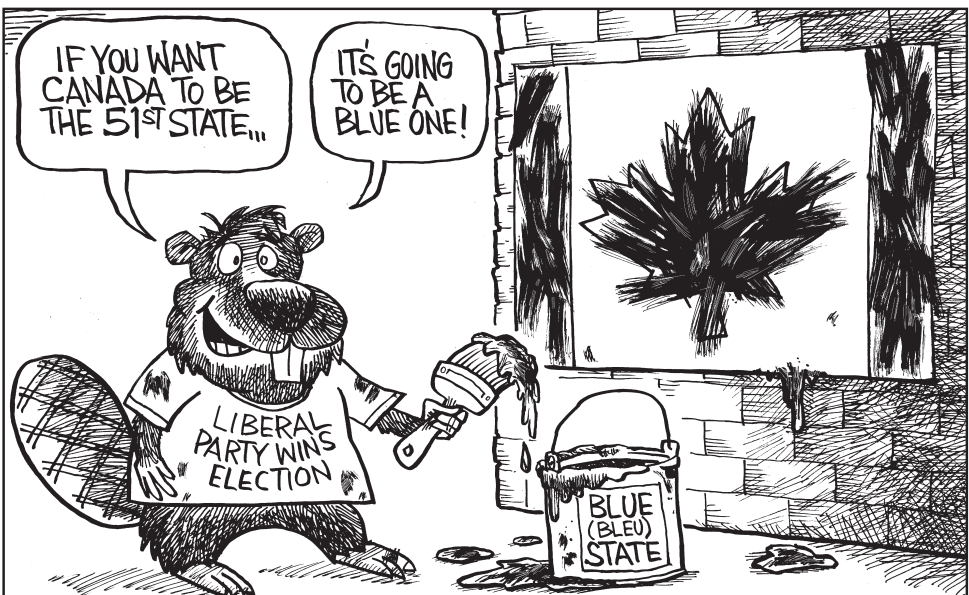
Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer who supports communities throughout the regional South. You can contact them at y@tasteoftorah.org.

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.

Echos
from Sinai
“Torah for
Everyone”
Rabbi
Yonatan
Hambourger



When the Phone Stopped Ringing

The welcome silence of this sylvan spring morning is misleading. Underneath the quiet is a rich tapestry of sound: bird talk, a gentle breeze moving the treetops, the distant alert of a crow, and the nearby objections of a chicken. Tree frogs are encouraging the clouds to produce more rain, and a squirrel is using language unfit for polite company.

“Quiet” in this hidden cove is the absence of sounds we don’t like: traffic, gunshots in the middle of the night, and just about anything in the Top 40.

There is one aspect of legacy technology I sometimes miss, and that is the sound of a telephone ringing. Smartphones don’t really ring. They ping and chirp and make angelic tinkling sounds or funny noises. You can configure them to ring like one of the old phones that used to hang on the wall attached to a wire, but a tiny speaker doesn’t resonate like metal on metal, and there is no replacement for the tactile sensation of a rotary dial, or even the feedback of a touch-tone handset.

Only 30% of Americans have landlines now, and I unplugged mine some time ago when it became more of a growing expense than a necessity. It wasn’t so long ago that we still glance from time to time at the place on the counter where the answering machine used to be.

We lost something in the landline’s exit from society, an unexpected consequence like those that accompany many of the wonders of technology meant to improve our lives but which also serve to weaken the fabric that protects us from the elements.

For nearly a century, when the telephone on the wall rang, we didn’t know who was on the other end of the line, and we spoke to whoever the caller might be—the in-laws, the kids’ classmates. Even if the call wasn’t meant for us, we shared a moment exchanging greetings, strengthening the fabric just a little, multiplied by millions of calls every day across the nation.

Answering machines became widespread in the 70s and ruled the roost for about 30 years before smartphones began to dominate communications. Answering machines were a boon to business, but they, along with caller ID, also allowed us to become more insular. We could screen calls and delay communication. If we felt obligated to call someone but didn’t really want to talk to them, we could wait until they weren’t home and leave a message.

Few Americans now are ever separated from their phones during waking hours. Half of us have never gone longer than 24 hours without our little glow boxes. Eighty percent check them within 10 minutes of waking up. Half of us keep them within reach while we sleep.

Yet we are more insulated and more divided than in living memory. With the ability to talk more using something that is never out of reach, we talk less, and as far as our opinions and our politics, we’re like the Appalachian pioneers or islanders in the South Pacific separated by the physical barriers of geography.

Instead of talking, we text, tweet, and post. We listen to professional talkers. Pixels don’t convey the nuances of the human voice, not to mention the body language of a face-to-face conversation. The written word can be packed with meaning, but those words are getting shorter along with our attention spans. What’s worse, education is failing to give us the tools to properly interpret the shrinking list of words we do recognize.

A friend who lives in the urban cliff dwellings recently commented on a walk through a university campus where he observed groups of young people moving from place to place with that characteristic slump, phones in hand, heads down and focused on the screens. There was no conversation within the pods of people. Yesterday we saw a family of five staring at five phones at a table in a restaurant, and they spoke not a word to each other.

The cell phone slump is not just endemic among our youth, but the young will pay the steepest toll. The charges keep appending for long-term spinal issues and sleep disruption induced during the formative years, and we don’t know if we can afford to pay when the bill comes due for entire generations.

A nation’s strength lies in the fabric of its connections—the voices shared across dinner tables, the laughter exchanged in passing, the unexpected calls that brought loved ones together. In our rush to embrace convenience, we’ve weakened that cloth. When the storm comes—and it always does—we may find that the fabric we thought would protect us has left us more exposed than we ever imagined. And maybe, just maybe, we’ll miss the ring of the telephone, not just for the sound it made, but for the bonds it once reinforced.

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Big Hornets and Wasps

There are a couple of different species of hornets and wasps that cause alarm for people. Since the Asian giant hornet (murder hornet) was found in Washington state in 2019 people are concerned when they find a big hornet or wasp. The Asian giant hornet has not been found in Georgia, but we do have a couple of other insects that people find and think that might be.

When someone finds a really big hornet most of the time it is a European hornet. These are really big. They can be 1.5 inches or larger. Sometimes they are confused with Giant Asian Hornets, because both are very large in size. The Asian giant hornet was only found in Washington state in the U.S. and as of December 2024 has been eradicated from the U.S. European hornets have black and yellow stripes, and sometimes a reddish color on their head.

They will defend their nest by stinging if anyone gets too close, and can sting repeatedly. They build large paper nests that are about 6 feet off the ground. Sometimes they will raid honeybee hives. A unique feature about them is that they will continue to work at night. Most hornets and wasps will decrease in activity at night, but that is not necessarily the case with these guys. They will be attracted to light at night. Usually they feed on large insects like grasshoppers, flies, and bees. They have even been seen tearing the wings off of butterflies and eating the body. If food becomes scarce they may move to fruit hanging on trees. They will also take bark from trees. If they take enough bark they will girdle a tree, which results in the tree dying.

European hornets are not native to North America. If you encounter European hornets it’s best to have a pest management company handle them. They are difficult to remove if you can’t find the nest.

Another big wasp is the cicada killer wasp. These are native to here. They can grow to be 1.5 – 2 inches long. Unlike the European hornet these wasps will make their nests in the ground. Cicada killers have a much darker abdomen. They are unlikely to sting, unless they are directly handled. Cicada killers will target cicadas and sting them. Once the cicada is paralyzed, it is carried back to the cicada killer’s nest. The nest will possibly be used for a couple of years. Cicada killers are solitary, but you can get over a hundred nesting in the same spot. Generally, treatment of a cicada killer nest is not needed.

Hornets and wasps both belong to the Vespidae family. Wasps tend to have a slenderer body and hornets are thicker. Most species of wasps are solitary, but the ones that we are more familiar with tend to be social wasps. Social wasps don’t seek people out to sting them, but they will defend their nest if they think they are under attack.

If you have questions about European hornets contact your county Extension office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Letters To The Editor

Re: Rep. Clyde Column

Dear Editor,

I read with some interest Andrew Clyde’s latest column in the Towns County Herald from April 30, purporting to speak for Democrats regarding the extrajudicial deportation of Abrego Garcia and defending the Trump administration’s refusal to comply with court orders that he return Garcia to the United States for an appropriate deportation hearing. Perhaps it is too much to expect Clyde to understand the difference between law and lawlessness.

Having been trained in the law, I understand allegation is not proof, a distinction Clyde and Trump have trouble comprehending. I am perfectly willing to entertain Clyde’s allegation of gang membership, but I am not willing to surrender the fundamental right of individuals to be confronted with their accusers and given an opportunity to answer the allegations. This is a human right contemplated in the Declaration’s phrase “inalienable rights,” enshrined in the Constitution’s 5th and 6th amendments and embellished in the 14th amendment. It is not a right reserved to citizens only.

If the allegations after a proper hearing bear out, then yes without reservation I say deport the man. But we as a people who believe in the rule of law must at least make some effort to follow the law, not expedite convictions on a basis of mere allegations.

As to whether the movement to return Garcia to the United States is a Democratic initiative, I think that deserves examination. With the exception of the district court judge who directed the administration to facilitate Garcia’s return, the majority of judges either protecting Garcia from deportation or confirming the district court’s order were either appointed under Trump or his Republican predecessors. It is a Trump administration official who stated Garcia’s deportation was an error in violation of court orders. Also, Pam Bondi can shift blame to El Salvador’s president all she wants but her boss in the Oval Office Tuesday night said he could bring Garcia back. But he won’t.

And there is the problem. Trump is happy to trample on the courts and the law if it suits his whims. No Democrat I know of is saying Garcia is a nice guy. No Democrat I know of is defending him as a person. But unlike Trump and apparently his sycophants in Congress like Clyde, we as Americans – real Americans who love country and Constitution – expect our leaders to act within the law. It is the law, not Democrats, that demands his return. And it is the law that will deport him based on evidence, not unproven allegations.

Clyde should quit casting aspersions and start doing his job by holding Trump accountable under the law for his illegal and cruel deportations policies.

David W. Plunkett

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