

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## Moral Society

### *The Heartbeat of a Moral Society*

Responsibility for others sits at the heart of any moral society. Yet for many Americans today, this principle feels increasingly endangered.

According to a Gallup Poll from last year, 78% of respondents believe that morals are getting worse in the United States. When asked to identify the nation's greatest moral failing, a "lack of consideration for others" topped the list by more than a two-to-one margin. This is more than a statistic – it reflects a deep sense that something vital is slipping away.

The consequences are not abstract. Stories of loneliness, family breakdown, and neighbors isolated from one another fill our newsfeeds and conversations. The U.S. Surgeon General recently declared loneliness and social disconnection a public health crisis. In times of crisis – whether during natural disasters or pandemic lockdowns – there are countless examples of people stepping up for one another. Yet, just as often, we hear of individuals suffering alone, or communities fracturing under pressure. The question for those who worry about moral decline is not just "What's wrong?" but "What can we do?"

The Torah offers profound wisdom through the contrasting examples of Noah and Abraham – two righteous men who faced a test of responsibility in eras of widespread corruption. Ten generations after Adam, G-d informed Noah of the coming destruction: "I've decided to put an end to humanity, for the earth is filled with robbery because of them, and I am destroying them from the earth. Make for yourself an ark..." (Genesis 6:13-14). Noah obeyed, spending 120 years building a massive ark, just as G-d commanded. According to tradition, the lengthy construction period was meant to provoke questions from passersby, giving Noah an opportunity to warn them and urge repentance. Yet, the record shows that Noah focused primarily on fulfilling his instructions and ensuring his family's safety. The result was that he survived the flood, but the rest of humanity perished – an outcome the prophet Isaiah later alludes to as "the waters of Noah," hinting at his shared responsibility for his generation's fate.

Abraham, by contrast, models a different kind of engagement. When G-d declared His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their notorious cruelty and injustice, Abraham did not remain silent. He pleaded with G-d, asking, "Will You even destroy the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city?" (Genesis 18:23-24). Abraham's negotiation continued, persistently seeking mercy not just for the righteous, but for the entire population – including those mired in wrongdoing. Though the cities were ultimately destroyed, Abraham's willingness to advocate for others – even the undeserving – was recognized and honored by G-d, who promised that "all nations on earth will be blessed through him" for pursuing charity and justice.

The contrast is clear. Noah fulfilled his obligations but remained separate, while Abraham embraced responsibility for others, regardless of their merits. In a time when moral standards are often seen as relative, and when public discourse can become harsh or indifferent, Abraham's example remains both challenging and necessary.

What does this look like in practice today? It may mean reaching out to a neighbor who lives alone, offering support to a family in crisis, or simply listening without judgment to someone struggling with addiction or anxiety. It could be seen in communities organizing meal trains for the sick, volunteers helping after a hurricane, or even the small, everyday acts of kindness that set a tone for others. These are not grand gestures reserved for the heroic or the holy, but simple expressions of the belief that every person is created in G-d's image and is therefore worthy of care.

The call to responsibility is not about fixing the world single-handedly or rescuing everyone from their troubles. Rather, it is about refusing to turn away. It is about seeing the pain, confusion, or loneliness around us and choosing to respond – however modestly – with compassion and moral clarity. When we do so, we carry forward the legacy of Abraham, serving not only as protectors of our own families but as ambassadors of light and hope in a world hungry for both.

At a time when many fear that morality is slipping away, the most effective response is to embody that responsibility in our own lives. The world changes when individuals choose to act – not out of convenience or social pressure, but out of a deep conviction that the well-being of others is, and always has been, our sacred concern.

*Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. You can contact him 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.

## Towns County Community Calendar

<b>First Monday of each month:</b> School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
<b>Every Tuesday:</b> Storytime for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
<b>First Tuesday of each month:</b> Hiaw. City Council... City Hall YH City Council... YH City Hall	6 pm 6:30 pm
<b>Second Wednesday of each month:</b> Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
<b>Third Monday of each month:</b> Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
<b>Third Tuesday of each month:</b> 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

Echoes from Sinai  
"Torah for Everyone"  
Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger



Joe Heller  
GRAPHICARTIST

## Biting Bugs

We have a number of insects that like to bite up here in the mountains. They can be quite irritating, so let's talk about some of them, and how you can prevent them.

UGA extension  
Watching and Working  
Jacob Williams



Chiggers are technically not insects because they have six legs as larvae but eight legs as adults. A common myth about chiggers is that they burrow into your skin. Chiggers do not burrow under the skin. They bite and release a chemical into your skin that kills cells. This turns the cells around the bite into a kind of slurrpee that the chigger drinks. It is also incredibly irritating to the person that has been bit. Chiggers like tall grass, and brush. They tend to stay away from resting in the sun, because they will dry out. If you have walked through an area that looks like it could have chiggers the best thing is to go inside, change clothes, and wash yourself off with warm, soapy water.

Ticks are also technically not insects because they have eight legs. Baby ticks are born and start climbing up anything that is nearby (grass, sticks, brush). They are hoping that a passerby will brush against whatever they are hanging onto, and they will get a free ride and a blood meal. If they find a suitable host, they will latch on and start feeding. Ticks can carry diseases like Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Lyme disease is most common in the northeast, Midwest, and mid-Atlantic regions. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever is most commonly found in southeastern states. It is not possible to tell if a tick is carrying the bacteria to cause disease. However, certain species of ticks are known to be more likely to carry disease than others, and it is possible to identify tick species.

Some nights in the summer time it seems like there are enough mosquitoes out there to carry you away. Like ticks and chiggers, mosquitoes don't like spots that are hot and dry, because their body will dry out quickly. Therefore, mosquitoes tend to come out at night. Mosquitoes tend to like areas with lots of moisture and still water. Shrubs and bushes provide cover for them to hide during the day.

For any of these pesky bugs the best way to try and get rid of them is to keep grass cut short and keep debris away from your house. If you are spending time outside, using an effective repellent is a good idea. Products containing DEET, oil of lemon eucalyptus, picaridin, permethrin, and catnip oil are all capable of repelling or killing mosquitoes, chiggers, and ticks. Another thing you can do is tuck your pants into your socks when hiking. This makes it harder for chiggers and ticks to hold on.

My mama taught me that hate is a strong word and to use it sparingly, but I hate chiggers even more than they seem to like me. Some people are more prone to getting bit by bugs. Scientists believe that this is related to the scents that person gives off. The scent from your body is largely tied to your genetics.

If you have questions about chiggers, ticks, or mosquitoes you can contact your County Extension Office, or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

## Letters To The Editor

### Be Prepared

Dear Editor,

The motto of the Boy Scouts, "Be Prepared," was devised by Baden Powell, an English soldier. The year was 1907. The Boy Scouts of America was founded in 1910. Someone once asked Powell, "Be prepared for what?" He replied, "Well, for any old thing." His goal for selecting the motto was to help young men to be prepared for whatever life threw at them.

I believe this motto should be adopted by everyone. An example that I often see in our community occurs when freezing and snowy weather are forecast. Our grocery stores are overwhelmed with customers stocking up. Our prepping nature, which we all have to some degree, swings into action. We check flashlights, propane, food supplies, and we make sure our vehicles are fueled to capacity.

A bad weather forecast, even one including tornadoes, will pale in comparison to some foreign adversary shutting down our communications grid, electrical grid or interrupting our fuel supply lines. Every town, large and small, would experience panic and chaos. Food supplies would be exhausted in a few days. And, God only knows how those married to technology would behave without it.

A little extra of this and that should be kept on hand for emergencies, storms or otherwise. Drinking water should also be included on that list. So, let's follow the Boy Scouts' lead, and "BE PREPARED." We are indeed living in turbulent times.

Gene Vickers

## 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.*

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## The Sentinel

In the autumn of a time long past, over three centuries of falling leaves and gathering acorns ago, a young Creek hunter moved silently through the dense forest near Little Whiteoak Creek, in the heart of the Koweta lands in what we now know as Coweta County, Georgia. His sharp eyes tracked a squirrel darting among the branches of a towering white oak tree. We'll never know the fate of that squirrel or whether the hunter's arrow found its mark, but the prized acorn the squirrel was carrying back to its nest was lost, tumbling to the ground in that sheltered cove by the creek's edge. The soft, loamy soil cradled it, hidden beneath a canopy of ferns, where the waters of the creek whispered quietly on their slow journey to the Chattahoochee River.

That humble acorn, nourished by the creek's steady flow, took root in the quiet cove, its sprouting unnoticed by the Koweta people who fished and farmed nearby. Over decades, it grew into a mighty white oak, its branches stretching wide, a sentinel of the forest. It stood through seasons of plenty and hardship, witnessing the laughter of Creek children, the councils of elders, and the changing tides of the land. By the time European settlers arrived, the tree was already a giant, its roots entwined with the stories of a vanishing world. For centuries, it endured – through storms, droughts, and the march of progress – until age and storms and the weight of the centuries caused it to lose part of its crown just last week. Yet even now, broken but proud, it stands as a testament to that lost acorn, a silent keeper of Coweta's deep history, whispering of a young hunter and a time when the creek, and the Creek, ran free.

My brother, William, and I spent many of the best days of our youth under that giant tree on our grandparents' farm. Its roots were sunk deeply into the water table and a hand-dug well at the base of the tree bore witness to the tree's longevity and the secret of its ability to thrive during the long, hot summers and drought years.

Our mother grew up under that tree. We played under it, cleaned many a fish after another successful Saturday on the pond, picked muscadines, and listened to our grandparents and great-grandparents telling stories, leaning back in the shade after a hearty Sunday dinner. We don't know how many other stories were sheltered by that sentinel. The farm our grandparents moved to during the Great Depression was old and in decline when they occupied it, but the tree had already borne witness to many long-forgotten stories.

We are concerned for the tree's future, of course. Chances are that it will outlive us all with those deep and well-watered roots. But to everything, there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. If I grieve for that tree I grieve truly for the passing of all big trees. I don't think we're making many these days. Over the last 10,000 years, the world has lost about one-third of its forests, with half of that loss occurring in the last century alone.

White oaks don't grow in asphalt and concrete. We cut the trees from our mountaintops so we can sit on our behinds and look out a window over the top of our phones. No sheltered cove is safe from our voracious appetite for more. And the trees we do grow are crops to be harvested to make toothpicks and toilet paper, and disposable lumber that splits and rots. We lose more than lumber with the passing of our sentinels when we forget the reasons why we play outside and sit in the shade listening to the old stories.

## Letters to the Editor

### New VFW Post Building

Dear Editor,

My dear Austrian friend Maria came to visit me from Atlanta on Saturday, July 5, and we had the great joy to witness the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the Grand Opening of the new VFW Post in Hiawassee. It was such an enjoyable and friendly event. It was crowned with a most delicious barbecue lunch with probably 50 different side dishes. The barbecue meat was so high on the bun I could hardly believe my eyes. Hundreds of people were attending this joyful dedication.

My friend Maria kept telling me: "It's so special for me to be among people who are so patriotic, friendly and joyful. This really was worth making the trip from Atlanta to the beautiful mountains of North Georgia. You are so blessed to live in this area where people are so friendly and want to take good care of our dedicated Veterans."

God bless all of you who had anything to do with this most worthwhile hard work and your most generous dedication to have this new post available for our dedicated veterans.

It made my heart sing the most beautiful melodies knowing that our veterans and the people in our communities have a lovely place to spend time together, like their most delicious Fish Fry held twice a month. I always wonder how many long-lasting friendships were created at these informal get-togethers.

Yes indeed, we in Hiawassee are truly blessed to have such a beautiful new VFW Post in our town for our many retired Armed Forces people and civilians in our deeply caring community.

I most sincerely pray I won't hear of another devastating veteran's suicide. May the peace of Christ reign in every heart in our community.

With lots of love and hugs of gratitude,

Margret Grizio

## Towns County Herald

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