

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## Yisro & the American Dream

By Yonatan  
Hambourger and  
Tzali Reicher



**Echos from Sinai**  
"Torah for Everyone"  
Rabbi  
Yonatan  
Hambourger

Yisro (or Jethro) "had it made" in his ancient home of Midyan, thought to be somewhere in the northwest of the now-Saudi Arabia. He was the leader of his pagan faith, a wealthy man, and a family man with seven daughters and a couple of grandchildren, and proudly had Moses – who had just led the enslaved Children of Israel out of Egypt and split the Red Sea – as a son-in-law.

On the heels of the miraculous events, we've discussed in the earlier chapter of Exodus, Yisro traveled into the desert to reunite with Moses and to witness the miracles for himself. Moses accorded him much respect, followed his suggestions about decentralizing the leadership structure, and spoke of the miracles they'd experienced up till now. Thoroughly convinced of the truth of the one eternal G-d, Yisro decided to cast away all of his life's beliefs and throw his lot in with the Jewish people, standing humbly with them to receive the Torah at the foot of Mount Sinai.

His turnaround is remarkable, but that isn't what is most striking about this story. Yisro was not a young man, and his legacy had already been cemented. He was revered in his native land and was at the pinnacle of his religion. Happily surrounded by his large family, he could have lived out his days content in his service and life achievements.

But he couldn't do that. Once Yisro saw what he perceived to be 'the light,' he couldn't ignore it. As Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory, the most influential rabbi in modern history wrote in Hayom Yom: "In spiritual matters one should always look at he who is higher than oneself, and plead with G-d to grant him the intelligence to learn from the other, and the ability and strength to rise higher." And Yisro wanted to rise higher. And so, Yisro made the brave and bold choice to start again in his spiritual journey, giving up his life of comfort and security to create a meaningful relationship with G-d.

The common interpretation of the American Dream often reduces it to the pursuit of material wealth or financial success. However, this simplistic view does not capture the essence of the enduring creed that our nation has embraced since its inception. If it were solely about opulence, then affluent individuals such as sheiks in Dubai and oligarchs in the former Soviet blocs could be considered as living the American Dream, reveling in their luxurious mansions, cars, and artwork.

Instead, the American Dream embodies the liberty to pursue success, opportunity, and fulfillment. Here in America, we are privileged with the right to chart our own course in achieving these goals. Rather than being bound to a rigid system or ideology, we possess the freedom to explore and discover the truths that align with our values—a legacy we aspire to pass on to future generations. The story of Yisro's spiritual journey resonates deeply with this theme.

Yisro's story is that he had it all and gave it up for a chance at spiritual fulfillment, along with true meaning and purpose. He chose to forge a new path, one aligned with his newfound understanding and conviction, and challenged the conventional notion of fulfillment and success tied solely to material wealth. He is a shining example of the enlightenment one can reach with the profound freedom to pursue a higher purpose, even a freedom from the trappings of fortune and fame.

The American Dream is not a static destination but a dynamic, evolving pursuit of a meaningful and purposeful life. Yisro's choice to abandon the familiar, echoes the spirit of those who have come to America seeking a new beginning, free from the constraints of the past, whether that be you or your ancestors.

Yisro's narrative serves as a poignant reminder that the American Dream is not confined to a specific demographic or defined by accumulated possessions. It is a universal call to purpose, question, and, if necessary, redefine one's legacy in pursuit of a more profound understanding of life's purpose. Yisro teaches us that true success lies in the courage to choose spiritual fulfillment over the comfort of conformity.

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### 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.

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Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor  
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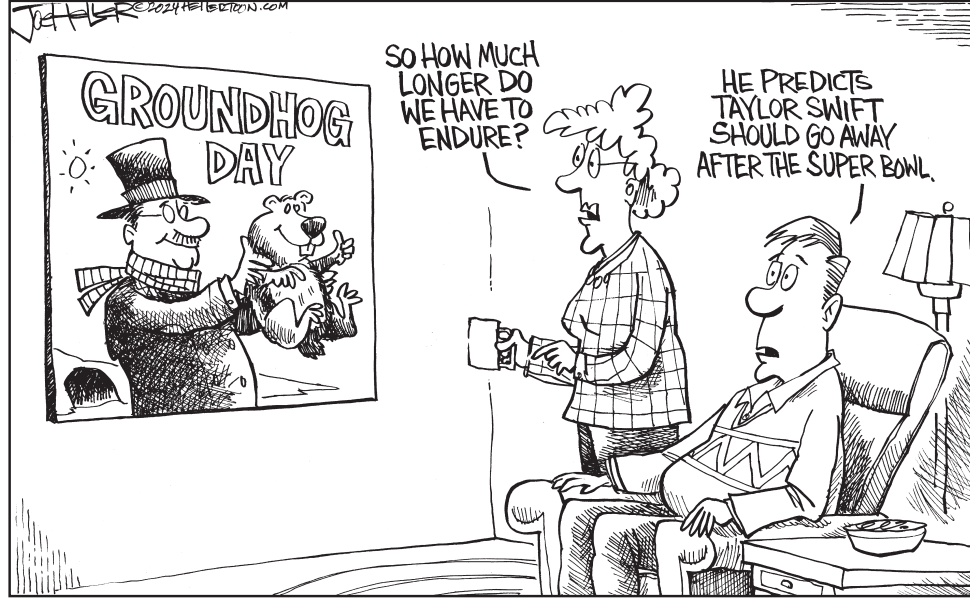
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Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc. Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers.

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## "The Power of Positive Thinking"

My mother liked Norman Vincent Peale books, but as a teenager I was of course much too sophisticated to read the copy of "The Power of Positive Thinking" she gifted me one Christmas. I ran across it the other day and had one of those bittersweet "wish I had listened" moments we sometimes have when we remember our departed parents.

**Outside The Box**  
By: Don Perry  
worldoutsidethebox.com

In a 1969 article for the Chicago Tribune, Peale wrote about an innovative approach to solving problems. He said, "[People] get caught up inside the box of their own lives. You've got to approach any problem objectively. Stand back and see it for exactly what it is. From a little distance, you can see it a lot more clearly. Try and get a different perspective, a fresh point of view. Step outside the box your problem has created within you and come at it from a different direction."

The expression is even older than that. One of the earliest published examples appeared in "The Annual Register" in 1888 in a discussion of the evolution of British politics: "...having changed at Mr. Gladstone's signal, from all but unanimous repudiation of home rule in 1885, to its enthusiastic support in 1887, the Liberal party became a one-man party which scarcely ventured to think outside the lines prescribed by its dictator."

Remarkable, isn't it, how human nature remains consistent against the changing background of politics, culture, and scientific advancement?

As for scientific advancement, thinking outside the box would surely be part of a working definition. It is at the heart of innovation, improvisation, and adaptation. I think it's often a component of humor as well. The successful comedian can catch us by surprise by revealing something familiar in a new light or from a different angle.

I still laugh when I glance at my saved copy of an old meme, "The redneck hot tub." It's an image of a guy in the bucket of a front-end loader. The bucket is full of water and suspended over a campfire. And yes, the only reason I haven't tried it is my bucket has drainage holes and my bathtub is deep enough to accomplish the same thing without having to split any more firewood.

We laugh out loud at the memes and the videos and feel superior to those rednecks and rubes, but if you're a guy you think to yourself, "You know, that's not such a bad idea," and quietly file it away for future reference.

We do live in an area with a long tradition of thinking outside the box. This is true of any spot on the globe where people had to struggle to survive, had to make do and make by hand. The farm tools I keep, passed down from grand and great grandfather, continue to impress me with the elegance of their simplicity and efficiency.

For all these reasons and more, getting outside the box became the motivation behind the title of this column and our unassuming and mostly friendly attempts to encourage others to do the same. Our crowded planet has grown smaller, and the walls have closed in, built by those in fear of the unruly herd.

I'm not speaking of physical walls, but of social, political, and intellectual boundaries designed to manage people like human capital, and often like cattle. Three hundred forty million people in the US get our highly curated information from 6 companies working hand in hand with the permanent administrative state. Our political choices usually boil down to a false dilemma designed to ensure the survival of the box. We have more taboos than the Puritans, and many of our youngsters live in fear of violating these restrictions on speech and thought itself.

"Well, that's all well and good but what does it mean? Give me something I can use."

There are several practical applications for this way of thinking. One of the most dangerous walls boxing in citizens (and their governments) is debt. Get out of it as quickly as you can, and avoid it if at all possible. In 2019, over 77% of American households were in debt. Debt can be one of the most controlling and most destructive factors in a lifetime.

Vast amounts of energy are applied in putting and keeping you in debt. Everything we are "supposed to do" financially involves our credit rating, from renting an apartment to getting the best insurance rate. Every pixel that lights up your retina has it's hand out, so think outside the box before you reach for your credit card.

Imagine how that giant flat screen television is going to look in the landfill in a few years. Think of trying to sell your new luxury SUV in a Facebook Marketplace because the dealer is offering you nothing on a trade. Ask yourself why you let that person pretending to be someone else on television inform your opinion on what you need to buy to enjoy the good life.

When you hear a news reader, a pundit, or a politician speak, ask yourself who is paying their salary. Picture them standing in a used car lot trying to sell you a low mileage sedan. Would you believe them if they told you those are actual miles?

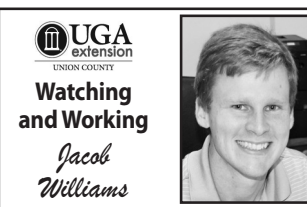
When your elected official makes a statement, does it sound plausible? Try imagining the exact opposite is true. If the opposite of what they are saying is also plausible, ask yourself what they are leaving out, and how many times they have lied before.

Historically when the walls break, things can get ugly, and then we all find ourselves outside the box forced to find new solutions to old problems. Better to at least get a foot in the door now. Sadly, escaping the crowded box of political, social and financial coercion involves a lot of healthy skepticism, but it can help to free a tremendous amount of intellectual and financial energy from the requirements of conformity so that it is available for creativity.

We may find that creativity has atrophied while confined in a culture that chooses Nintendo over Noodle Art and prefers to adventure online over walking in the woods. Start with something simple. As an old mentor once suggested, "When you're faced with a problem, try staring at a tree for a while. Don't look at the leaves and the branches. See the tree as the spaces in between."

## Raised Beds

This week I would like to talk about raised beds. There are many different ways to make raised beds. So I'll go through different types of materials that you can use and some basic principles to use when building your raised beds. I'll also talk about situations where I like raised beds over growing in the soil and vice versa.



UGA extension  
UNION COUNTY  
**Watching and Working**  
Jacob Williams

Raised beds are a great tool to use if you don't have a lot of sunlight in your yard. Plants grown in raised beds will still need full sun, but if you only have a small area of your yard that has full sun, a raised bed is a good way to maximize that spot. If you have slopes that are too steep to plant, leveling out a small area and putting in a

raised bed in that spot is another good idea. Oftentimes, the best soil in Towns and Union is found in river bottoms. If you don't have the good fortune of putting your garden in one of those places, growing in raised bed will also be much easier than fighting with heavy clay soils. Raised beds are also going to have fewer weed issues, and less soil compaction. You can build elevated raised beds to that you don't need to do as much bending down.

Dimensions for a raised bed depend on the materials that you are using. Generally, I like raised beds that aren't more than 4 feet across. If you have really long arms you can make them wider. I also like beds that are about 8 feet long. If you make long beds, it's just more difficult to walk around them, especially if you've put a bunch of raised beds next to each other. 10 inches height will be enough depth for most vegetables. Root crops like potatoes and carrots will need more depth. The deeper you make the raised bed the more material you will need to fill it. Soil to fill raised beds costs money, so don't make them needlessly deep. If you have tall crops planted in your raised beds they can shade out other crops, so orient them in a north-south direction. You want the raised bed to be completely level. To do this you may need to dig out the place where you're putting it.

Let's move on to materials that you can use. There are several different types of lumber. Cedar is very good, because it does not rot quickly. However, it is very expensive. Cypress is often easier to get than cedar. Oak and other hardwoods can be difficult to find in sufficient quantities, and are only a little more rot resistant than pine. Pine is the most readily available and cheapest lumber. It will rot, but I've seen where you can get several years of use out of pine. An alternative to lumber is cement blocks, brick, concrete, or stone. If you are going to build the wall high, you would need some mortar to keep the walls from falling.

The research that is available says that pressure treated wood is safe to use for food production. Arsenic is no longer used to pressure treat wood, and has not been used since 2005. Wood treated with creosote should not be used. Railroad ties and utility poles are treated with creosote.

If you have questions about building your own raised beds contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

## Letters To The Editor

### Unbelievable Irony

Dear Editor,

A headline in the Towns County Herald, dated January 17, read "Mayor Ordiales to step down from office." The following week, dated January 24, a long article detailing the initiative #Hikeawassee recognizes this very successful program created to support hikers and the City of Hiawassee. The article further announces that Mayor Ordiales (same mayor) will be acknowledged at the GMA annual meeting and will accept an award from Georgia Trend Magazine and from the Georgia Municipal Association naming Hiawassee a "Visionary City of the Year." This award is in recognition of cities that "create positive change through collaboration and civic engagement." If the word oxymoron was used to describe circumstances/events, I believe this would surely qualify.

Believe Howard

### God's Standards

Dear Editor,

I serve a God who is Holy and perfect in all His ways, and I ponder how I can be holy and perfect like God. Living in a sinful world has its challenges and living a life worthy of my God has been my goal since I was saved in 1992. Our modern-day culture is not vertically upward as in the days of our forefathers who laid down the foundation of what Christianity was all about, that God our Creator, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were to be worshipped in spirit and truth. Today a lot of folks say they are Christians, but never seem to act the part. They complain and murmur and can't seem to get on the same page of what is vital to the work of the Lord, Jesus. If only they would work hard at what God wants them to do, the gospel message might spread more rapidly. Christians who are lazy about God's work reminds me of taking a frog to a nearby pond and putting it into the water. The frog will start swimming and seeking food or be lazy and look for the nearest lily pad to sleep on. Christians must be active if we are to win souls for God.

We get out of this life what we put into it. Jesus didn't come and die on the cross so that His servants could just do their own thing and let someone else do God's work. There is a time in eternity when we all will give an account of our actions towards God's kingdom work, whether good or unaring. Back in ancient days when there was an indebtedness or mortgage on a dwelling in Israel, the fact was written on a paper, a legal document, and put on the doorpost so that all their neighbors and friends would know that they had a mortgage on their place. Another copy was kept by the one who held the mortgage. When the debt was paid, the second copy, the carbon copy, was nailed over the other doorpost so that all could see that the debt was paid in full.

This is the difference between the dealings of God with His people in the Old Testament and with us in our day. It separates Christianity from all pagan religions and from the Mosaic Law. Folks, God has done all He can to put His stamp of approval by sending His son, Jesus to die for mankind's sin. You can't earn your way to heaven. You can't pay enough money to enter heaven. You can't enter heaven on your good works, for no one is righteous. We all fall short of the glory of God. We need only to accept what Christ has done. This is the word of comfort for a lost world. God's standards are to be respected and dealt with by a servant's heart willing to go the extra mile and to be pleasing in God's sight. The Cross of Christ still makes a difference when you come as you are and live by God's standards.  
Frank F. Combs

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