

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## The Presidents and Me

By Yonatan  
Hambourger and  
Tzali Reicher  
As an American  
rabbi, the relation-  
ship between  
our leaders and  
the Jewish com-  
munity have always held a personal fascination

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



For me, and the recent observance of Presidents' Day provided a valuable opportunity for contemplation and indulgence to this area of interest. It was particularly interesting to look into the history and lessons that we can glean with 250 years of history behind us.

From the inception of the United States with George Washington, the early presidents were generally devout and religious, maintaining a mutual respect for the Jewish community. John Adams eloquently wrote to Thomas Jefferson, "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize man than any other nation." Subsequent presidents such as John Q. Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Warren G. Harding expressed their aspirations for the Jewish people to reestablish a formal state in their homeland of Israel.

Notably, Millard Fillmore and Martin Van Buren denounced anti-Semitic attacks and discrimination, while Ruth-erford B. Hayes displayed a unique gesture of solidarity for this day by attending a Passover seder with Jewish soldiers under his command. A seder is now celebrated annually in the White House. The only Jewish expulsion in American history occurred in 1862, orchestrated by then-Union General Ulysses S. Grant in parts of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky. Grant, however, sought to make amends for this regrettable incident during his presidency.

In more contemporary history, the president's relationships with the Jewish community have been more complicated.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's legacy is hotly debated for his actions during the Holocaust. However, it is a fact that he played a pivotal role in leading the war effort against Nazism, regardless of his underlying motivations. Harry Truman, in a contrasting vein, recognized Israel's independence within 11 minutes of its declaration, yet his public remarks about Jewish people were occasionally derisive.

Despite the Kennedy family's historical association with Nazis, they proudly identified as Zionists, while Richard Nixon, despite personal animosity towards Jews, strategically supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War. Jimmy Carter's actions before and after his presidency offended many in the Jewish community; a situation partially remedied by Ronald Reagan's warm embrace of overt religiosity and Israel.

Subsequent administrations showed varying degrees of warmth towards America's primary ally in the region. Despite this much speculated ambivalence towards the Jewish state, George H.W. Bush facilitated the airlift of 14,325 Ethiopian Jews living in peril, to Israel in a 36-hour period. While Barack Obama maintained relatively cooler ties, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden consistently fostered positive relationships with Israel and extended gestures to the Jewish community during their respective presidencies.

There are a few things we can see from the dynamics between America's leaders and a small, albeit proud, faith group well represented in the United States.

The first is that even before the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, the historical significance and importance of the Land of Israel to the Jewish faith was always understood and respected by the U.S. The Muslim faith has Mecca along with 49 Muslim countries and 22 Arab countries, while the Jewish people have but a sliver of land in the Middle East, smaller than New Jersey. While there has been a continual presence of Jews in Israel from time immemorial, they did not have self-rule for almost 2,000 years until their dream was realized, thanks in large part to U.S. support. What's clear is how presidents practically dealt with Israel dictated their relationships with American Jewry for better and for worse. Yes, American Jews are proudly American, but there is always Israel in their hearts, because there are three basic pillars of Judaism from which all else springs: The G-d of Israel, the Torah of Israel, and the Land of Israel.

Another standout lesson is how lucky we all are that our leaders have remained true to the founding principles of this great country. Founded with a call for religious freedom and liberty to all, the United States has been a light onto the world, inspiring generations who have been attracted to promises and privileges afforded to those fortunate enough to live here. After centuries of persecution, the Jewish community in the United States is the largest outside of Israel, and a proud and important fabric in this amazing tapestry that connects all Americans, regardless of race, religion, or creed. It's an honor American Jews do not take for granted.

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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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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.\*

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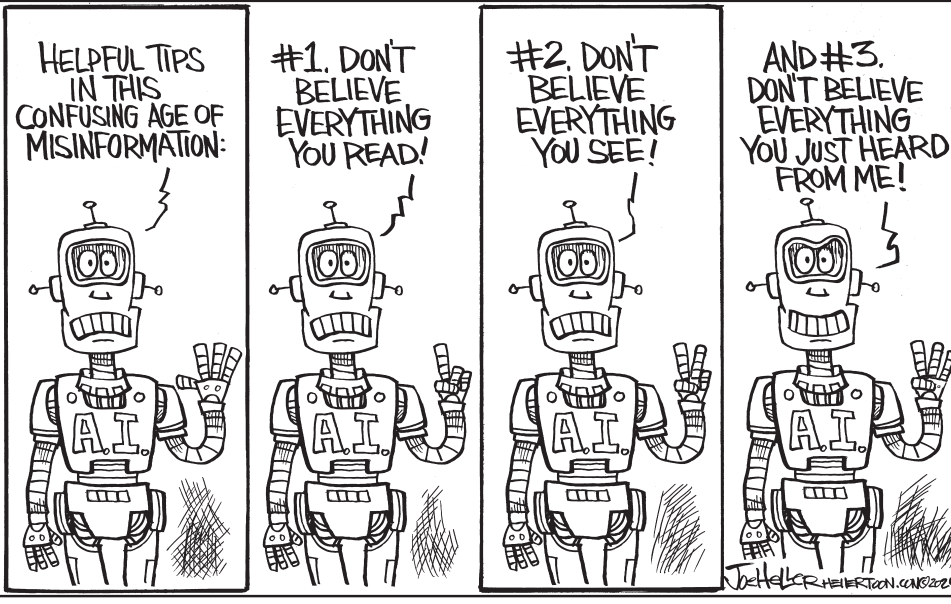
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## My iFriend And Me

I was paid a compliment the other day when someone thanked me for helping them procrastinate. We had chatted aimlessly and amiably for a couple of hours, managing to find humor in the most unexpected places.

Just about everything can be funny if you look at it from the right angle. Even the most pompous one-name celebrity is funny when they drop their keys in the toilet, and humor is a much-needed tonic in this age of fear.

Finding that angle is easier when you have a friend who does geometry the same way as you. C. S. Lewis said, "Friendship is born at that moment when one man says to another: 'What! You too? I thought that no one but myself...'"

When you find that friendship, hold on to it. Nurture it. The more pages turn on the calendar, the harder it is to find, and as the hive mind of fear and bestial gratification claims more and more of our collective consciousness, the harder it is to maintain.

As a member of the penultimate generation that grew up with telephones attached to wires, it's hard to explain to someone who grew up with pixels the sequence of events which led to the demise of the conversation, or the importance of two friends talking in helping to anchor our spirits in stormy seas or in filling our sails in the doldrums.

I think it began with the answering machine which, to our more recent arrivals on the planet, was the grandfather of voicemail. That machine enabled call screening. You could put off a conversation for another time, and unfortunately for friendship, this coincided with the time when western civilization began working more hours for less purchasing power – just as the number and variety of things we were conditioned to purchase exploded.

We'll skip lightly over the story everyone knows, of how information technology and the internet forever changed the way we communicate, and we'll fast forward to today when many consider it rude to call without texting first.

The net result is that the phone rings less often with calls from people who want to chat with us and with whom we also want to chat. There are many calls from computers and people who want to sell us crap (call screening is now indispensable), but not many from people who want to pass the time enjoying the shared vision of friendship.

It didn't happen all at once, but through attrition. Over time those calls, even from people with whom we were close, were replaced, first by email. Then texting. Raise your hand if you can quickly name the friends – and family – who send funny cat pictures, links to videos and "interesting articles" much more often than they share their own thoughts or even a few moments of listening to each other talk.

It's impossible to predict what the hive mind has in store for humanity, but with the advent of artificial intelligence, I will not be surprised to see the virtual buddy beginning to fill the void vacated by friendship with something scarcely more tangible than the emptiness. I'm waiting for Apple to introduce the iFriend soon.

Human nature is stubborn, however. Notice that the hive mind has been thus far unable to completely overcome the natural urgings of that nature. The young still find reasons to chat in a way that utilizes the vocal chords even as their parents search Google for more cat pictures.

I have a young friend who, to the uninformed, might be considered a "gamer," and he has helped make me one as well, at least occasionally. With our headsets connected to console and computer, we have slain many foes together. Last week we ruled Halo for a good hour and a half – but during this time we talked. Really talked. We chatted in the ancient way about weather and family and current events, and at the end of our visit, surrounded by the bodies of our enemies, we were satisfied.

Of course, even in the good old days, if you had "a lot" of friends there was never enough time to speak with all of them at length, especially when the length of the wire attaching the phone to the wall was so limiting. But there were always a few who, when they called, would inspire you to sit down for a bit, or cradle the phone contentedly while you chopped the celery or washed the dishes.

I would venture to say that your list of people like that has grown shorter over time. If you're like me, you'll have friends you see occasionally, even regularly, and when you do, you'll talk across a table or even a campfire and use the vocal chords God gave you for the purpose for which they were given. You might not even look at your phone for a while.

If you're lucky, you may have a lot of friends like that, but my guess is, on the day after that gathering several might text, but only a handful, perhaps only one or two, will call to share a thought they just had, or ask how your mother is doing after her surgery.

Make it your mission to call those people too, because when those conversations cease, there is nothing in the material world, or the virtual, which can replace them.

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## To Burn or Not to Burn?

We are entering the time of year when prescribed burns are more and more common. I want to talk about why prescribed burns are important. I think that generally we understand that they are important, otherwise we wouldn't take the risk of doing them, but they are important in more ways than many understand.

To talk about the importance of prescribed burns we also have to talk about natural forest succession. Forest succession can look different depending on where you live. For us, it can start with meadow lands. Meadows would have plants like asters, queen Anne's lace, and broom sedge. After about 5 years, the meadows will start to grow up some more and brush like sumac and blackberry will start to take over. At year 20, we would see a young pine forest start to emerge. This pine forest would start to mature and at about year 70, we would see an understory of hardwoods begin to emerge in the mature pine stand. From year 70 on, the forest begins to transition to a hardwood forest. At 100 years, we've reached the forest climax which is a mature oak-hickory forest. If there is no intervention, either natural or man-made, our forests will remain at the mature oak-hickory forest stage.

So, what's wrong with allowing our forests to stay at the mature oak-hickory stage? And if it is wrong then what can be done about it? To answer the first question when all or a majority of our habitat is in the mature oak-hickory stage we have less diversity of habitat. Diversity of habitat is necessary to be able to support a diversity of wildlife, plants, fungi, and everything else that creeps, crawls, and grows in the woods. Deer need a diverse habitat to thrive. They need brush cover to protect fawns. Mature forests have very little cover and leave fawns exposed to roaming coyotes and bears. The deer also need mature forest for the mast crop (acorns and other nuts) that those trees provide every year. Our deer population is in decline, which is not due to overhunting as there are fewer and fewer hunters each year. Turkey populations are also in decline, in part because there is not sufficient brush cover for poult (baby turkeys). Bobwhite quail have become very rare in Georgia, because they need brush for their habitat. Grouse have also become rare because they make their home in the transition area between habitat types. These are just a few examples of species that we have seen a decline or significant decline in population.

Controlled burns reset the natural forest succession process, allowing a diverse array of habitats that support a diverse array of wildlife. Historically, in the southern US, wildfires would burn parts of the landscape every 1 to 3 years. Now in the southeast it's estimated that 4% of lands that could be burned are in a burn rotation. With the development that we have now it's a good thing that we don't have wildfires raging through the southeast every 1 to 3 years. Controlled burns are able to keep the fuel load in the forest down to prevent that from happening. But if we don't have enough controlled burns or responsible timber harvest from public lands then we won't see the rejuvenation of the forest necessary for it to sustain a diverse group of species for generation after generation.

If you have questions about controlled burns you can contact the Georgia Forestry Commission, the US Forest Service, or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

## Letters To The Editor

### Why We Should Support Ukraine

Dear Editor,

Since the start of the Cold War, say 1947, our entire Defense Industry has geared towards defeating the Soviet Union. We thought that fight was over when it dissolved in 1993, but no, Vlad Putin has kept that old carcass alive by mostly employing the Soviet tactics of Fear, Murder, and Corruption. Now the Old Beast is on its last gasp, and Putin's only hope of keeping it breathing is by annexing Ukraine.

Unlike Moscow, Kiev has replaced Corruption with Democracy, and is moving towards Europe and away from Asia and the old Soviet-style thinking. NATO is under attack on the Ukrainian Steppes as surely as if it was 1980 and T-72's were pouring in from East Germany.

The entire Western Military Industrial Complex (I was a participant for 20 years) has been geared towards countering whatever latest Soviet Plane, Tank, BMP, or Missile for generations. Designers, Engineers, Technicians and millions of plain Office Workers spent entire careers supplying military equipment to fight the Soviets, so to supply it to those that need it for its intended purpose only makes sense.

Older armaments, like artillery shells and other explosives, must be disposed of in accordance with Accepted Practices and Standards, a costly endeavor. How much better to send that near-expired "medication" to its destiny "Patients" of Ukraine? Let all that ordinance fulfill its needy on T-90's, 72's, 55's or Armatas for that matter. And let every Western – oh, make that EVERY arms manufacturer – send some stuff to the Ukrainians for live-fire testing, another expensive proposition in peacetime.

The Ukrainian military has shown itself adept at integrating every scrap of aid they are given, and adapting as necessary whatever they are supplied with. So come on Australia, South Korea and Malaysia. Send some arms. Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. The Ukies are willing to use it all, and why not?

THEIR country was INVADED. Their apartment complexes and schools hit with missile strikes. War is never good, and no one's hands are ever clean afterwards, but if there was ever a plain case of aggression, more accurately invasion, here it is. Again, this is Putin's last gasp, he knows down to his black soul it is Hitler or die.

Like the Idler's Die of the Bulge, Russia has no more troops to sacrifice after this, this is it. Russia, or more accurately under Putin, USSR Lite, is pretty much bankrupt, economically, emotionally, morally. Putin knows this, so he tries to stir up memories of the Great Patriotic War and tries to paint the Ukrainians as Nazis. But it won't work. The Russian people know that what spews from their government is lies and worse. They know of the new digital registration, a precursor to conscription. Young people are trapped, and know that it is them that will be sacrificed in Putin's Funeral Pyre.

And when enough of them resist, we may see an end to Putin, his USSR revival dreams, and Moscow's pull on a plethora of Eurasian Nations.

Mark Wolchko

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