

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

To Be Chosen

By Yonatan
Hambourger and
Tzali Reicher

Witnessing the resurgence of blatant anti-Semitism evokes a sense of disillusionment among Jews and compassionate individuals from all backgrounds, highlighting that humanity's oldest form of hatred remains as evident as it has ever been. This resurgence confirms that while the reasons and excuses for anti-Semitism may change, the fact remains that many would like to be rid of the Jews.

Recently, age-old antisemitic tropes meant to distort the truth and fuel division are making a resurgence. Jews are being accused of "Jewish supremacy" and hatred towards non-Jews. These claims, however, are more than just incorrect; they are a gross misrepresentation of the core values of Judaism. Our purpose in this discussion is to explore what Judaism really has to say about the relationship between Jewish people and the people around them:

To understand the truth, let's begin with the book of Genesis (1:26) wherein G-d states, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." In the words of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory (1902-94), the most influential rabbi in modern history, "The reason G-d created man from a single being is so that all people will know that they descended from the one and same single progenitor, a fully developed human being created in the image of G-d, so that no human being could claim superior ancestral origin. Thus, we can cultivate a real feeling of kinship in all interhuman relationships."

So how does that square with the idea that G-d refers to Israel as "His people" (Deuteronomy 7:6); His "treasured possession" (Psalm 135:4); and even the "apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8)? The Torah tells us that G-d tasked the Jewish people with building a particular type of society with its unique heritage, beliefs, and behaviors. But this is not a contradiction to the concept that all humans are created in the divine image, for every individual and every nation and religion has its divine tasks.

This idea is often misunderstood, and used by detractors of Jewish people to create a false idea that Jewish people believe they are superior to the rest of the world. It doesn't mean that Jews are inherently superior to others. Rather, it means they were chosen by G-d to fulfill a unique mission – that "Nations shall walk by Israel's light and kings by the glow of Israel's radiance" as stated by the Prophet Isaiah (60:3). This mission comes with a high level of responsibility, not privilege. Jews are required to follow 613 commandments (mitzvot) and to hold themselves to a rigorous ethical standard. Being "chosen" is about what Jews are obligated to do, not about claiming superiority over others.

G-d deemed that it was not enough for the Jewish people to observe the unique commandments given to them by G-d. He also instructed them to cultivate the moral standards of their neighbors and fellow citizens. In fact, G-d laid out laws for all of humanity, not just the Jewish people. These laws are known as the Noahide Laws because they are universal laws to be followed by all of Noah's descendants and by extension, all of humanity. They offer a comprehensive framework for leading a moral and virtuous life. Adhering to these laws significantly enhances the quality of life in our world, making it a more joyful, peaceful, and moral place to live. It is worthwhile to note that these laws are compatible with Christianity and Islam.

These universal Laws encompass essential principles that offer profound wisdom and practical guidance for life. In their simplest form, these laws include (1) reliance on the singular source of life, your loving and attentive Creator; (2) expressing gratitude to the Divine through thought, speech, and prayer; (3) striving to improve the lives of others, recognizing that saving one life equates to saving the entire world; (4) respecting the sanctity of human relationships and cultivating a culture of love and dignity, particularly within family life; (5) embracing a life of generosity and contentment; (6) being accountable for the welfare of all of creation, including animals and the planet; and (7) promoting a system of genuine justice and charity, encouraging others to act with fairness and generosity.

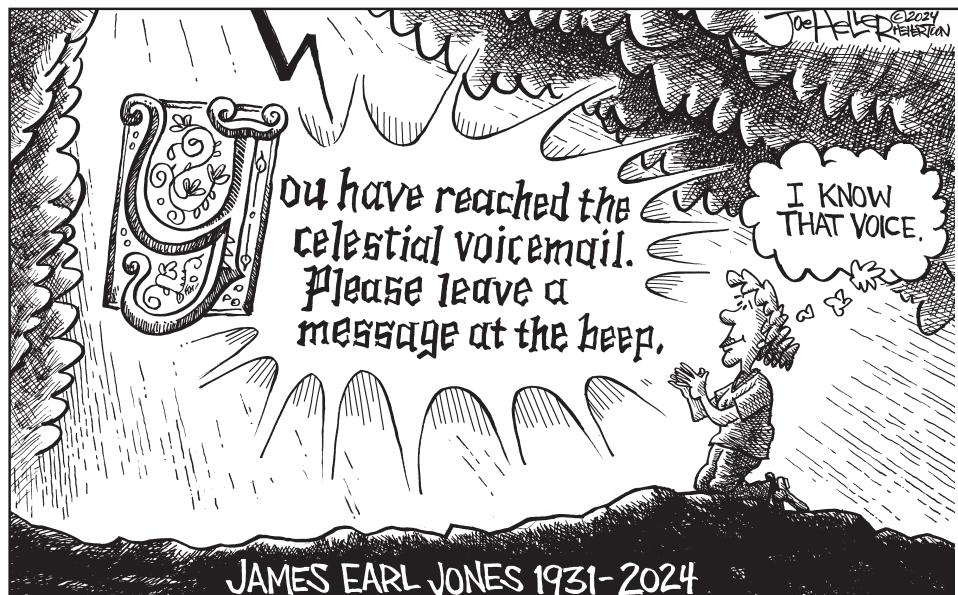
Judaism does not preach that Jews are superior to non-Jews. It teaches that Jews have a special covenant with G-d that brings with it a unique set of responsibilities. Importantly, Judaism has never sought to impose its beliefs on others. Unlike many other religions that have conducted crusades, inquisitions, holy wars, or terror attacks to spread and impose their faith, Judaism respects the paths of others and has never encouraged conversion or forced adherence.

All religions, by their nature, believe their path to be true; otherwise, people wouldn't choose to follow them. Judaism is no different – Jews believe in their path, just as others believe in theirs. But the reality is that Jewish people have always coexisted peacefully with others, advocating for justice, fairness, and righteousness in all interactions.

The Jewish legacy is one of love, unity, and a relentless pursuit of justice for all. We should be coming together to uphold these values, not allowing falsehoods to tear us apart. In the Jewish worldview, everyone has a place, everyone has value, and everyone is part of a greater plan for peace and goodness. We are each G-d's children, and we each have an essential role to play in improving the world.

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Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
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JAMES EARL JONES 1931-2024

A Peach of a Problem

When both sets of my grandparents were still hale and hearty, there were many summers when our family helped maintain three separate gardens. Some of my most cherished memories include late nights past bedtime breaking beans on the screened porch and listening to the old stories, my grandmother's "working man's" lunch of salt pork and green onions, and helping out in the kitchen while the whole family pitched in to can beans, tomatoes and vegetable soup. How often the dreaded chores of youth become the longings of adulthood.

The late summers of my wistful nostalgia were energized by regular family trips to orchards, farmers markets and produce stands to supplement what someone in the family didn't already provide. Peach and apple orchards were numerous across Georgia and the Carolinas, and naturally the peach orchards were the kids' favorite because in the days before every movement we make was monetized, you were free to eat as many peaches as you wanted while you picked.

The orchard we liked best had superb fruit and the prices were affordable. It was a family owned and operated business, and all hands were on deck during harvest time. As is still the case with the few orchards remaining today, you could buy the peaches picked or pick your own for a significantly lower price.

The orchard prospered and grew over the years and was passed down to younger generations who were even more adept at making a profit. New crops were added, and new products were shipped in from far away. Eventually, you had to ask if you wanted to know if your produce was locally grown. Over time, the business evolved from a farmers market where families could make their dollars go farther buying healthy food, to a tourist attraction. The business expanded to a second location. Some of the family members went into politics. We rarely visit anymore because the prices have outrun even our runaway inflation.

Last week Tracey and I ventured into the upstate of South Carolina in search of nostalgia and to follow rumors of places where our dollars might go a bit farther. We found a beautiful farm with a restaurant and a store that sold locally produced products as well as that array of jars, all those jams, jellies and sauces that gather dust in scores of roadside attractions waiting to catch the traveler's eye.

We bought a few expensive late season peaches, enjoyed a panoramic view of the Blue Ridge Mountains, made a note to return some day when the restaurant was open, and left a bit disappointed. We had some tasty morsels to take home but had failed to find the bargain we sought for pumping up the larder with some canned peaches and frozen cobbles.

On the way home Tracey eyed a handmade sign pointing down a two lane blacktop, so we turned down the country lane to see what we might find. At the edge of an orchard stood a handbuilt shed and a small store with a floor of rough sawn planks. Two delightful ladies were busy sorting peaches and apples for sale, and we visited with them for a while.

The elder of the women was well past retirement age and bright as a button. She told a sad story, however, of the struggle to keep the orchard going. "I don't know if we can do it another year. The work is hard on my husband as it is, but now all the trees need spraying and he just can't do it anymore. We can't find anyone to do it for us. Nobody wants to work."

We bought a half bushel of delicious peaches and promised to return in October for the late season apples. The peaches were exactly half the price of the other farm, which was a fourth less costly than the Georgia tourist market we mentioned earlier. Inflation, by the way, is not evenly distributed. On average a dollar goes farther in South Carolina than it does in Georgia. Groceries in Hiawassee are more expensive than they are on Saint Simon's Island.

This week I was looking at some health statistics comparing what ails us now to the state of our health a few generations back. While medical science has advanced tremendously, we have actually become less healthy in several ways. The incidence of diabetes has increased about sevenfold since the 1970's. Also, during the 70's, about 13% of adults and 5% of children were considered obese. Today those numbers have increased to 43% for adults and 19% for children.

There is not a single culprit for this decline in health. Sedentary lifestyles, processed foods and sugary drinks all contribute heavily to the problem. A deeper dig reveals significant cultural and economic changes have also contributed. Most of the food we consume now is corporate food from centralized distribution points far from the retail markets. To preserve that food for the long journey from the factory farm, through the processing plants and then on the truck to the grocer, a host of additives and preservatives are required. Even our "organic" food is sealed in endocrine disrupting plastic.

There remains a strong desire for fresher, healthier, "farm to table" food, but the supply lags far behind the demand, and healthier food is simply not affordable for a vast number of Americans. In a nearby town there is a farm to table restaurant where you can get a \$50 pizza or enjoy a couple of small entrees for about \$65. The food is healthy and delicious, but unlikely to be on the menu for a salaried person who has a half hour for lunch.

We have to eat, and when there is limited time for a meal, fast food and processed food is the only choice. There is no homemade canned soup in the larder at home because we didn't have time to plant a garden. Fertilizer was too expensive. We were too tired from working so much overtime. The local produce markets are few and far between, and more often than not their produce comes from the same faraway sources as the grocer.

I wish I knew the antidote for our species' flawed ability to reason. It's a peach of a problem. Some of us want to linger in the past. Some believe that "progress" is always good. We seem incapable of selecting the best from both, keeping what works and discarding what doesn't. We're all left or all right, all black or all white. Clearly, centralization is good for some things and bad for others. It's great for building interstate highways and defending our shores. Not so good for a food supply chain, an electrical grid, or for that matter, a system of government.

Outside The Box

By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

Sweet Sorghum

Fall feels like it is here. Sweet sorghum in the fall is part of culture and history in the mountains. It used to be more common and there were sorghum mills scattered all over the place. There are still a few people who grow sweet sorghum for syrup and carry on the tradition. Today let's talk about the history of sorghum, how it's grown, and how it's turned into syrup.

Sorghum is a member of the grass family. It originated in Northeastern Africa. Sorghum has been bred to fulfill four different modern day uses. Grain sorghum is used for flour. Forage sorghum is used to feed livestock. Biomass sorghum is used for bioenergy. Sweet sorghum is used for sorghum syrup. Sorghum made its way to America in the 1850s. Today, the Southeast, and particularly Appalachia, is known for sorghum syrup production.

Sorghum syrup production has declined over the years. This decline is largely due to its production being heavily labor intensive. Production has also declined as other glucose syrups have taken over. However, recently sorghum syrup has seen a bit of a resurgence with the increased interest in locally made products.

Sorghum is an important crop because it performs well under adverse soil conditions or drought. It does not require a lot of fertilizer, and adding too much nitrogen to the soil will decrease sugar levels. Typically sorghum is planted in May and ready to harvest at mid- September through early October. Weeds can be an issue with sorghum because it grows very slowly at the beginning of the season, giving the weeds a chance to grow up around it.

Sugarcane aphid is the biggest challenge of growing sweet sorghum. Sugarcane aphid is an invasive species that is resistant to many different insecticides, making it very difficult to control. It overwinters in south Florida and moves northward each year. If left untreated, sugar cane aphids will destroy a field of sorghum. When they start to arrive, you will see hundreds of them clustered on a plant, and they will feed off that plant until it dies and move onto the plant next to it. There are websites that are used to track the movement of sugarcane aphids northward each year to let growers know when they need to begin the treatment.

The key to producing good syrup is to have a high Brix level in the sorghum stalks. Brix is a measurement of sugar in an aqueous solution. One degree Brix is 1 gram of sucrose in 100 grams of aqueous solution. Deheading, or removing the seed head at the top of the plant will increase the Brix number. It is also important to harvest at the time when Brix is at its peak. After it peaks, it will start to decline.

Once the sorghum is harvested, it must be pressed to extract the juice out of it. Historically this was done with a mule-powered press, but there are electric ones available now. The juice is allowed to settle and then run through the pan. The pan is over a fire that cooks out the water in the juice. Typically, a producer will get 1 gallon of syrup for 8-10 gallons of juice. After cooking, the syrup is ready to sell.

If you are interested in growing sorghum, contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Letters To The Editor

Change Is Inevitable

Dear Editor,

The horse and buggy gave way to the automobile, and the traditional kitchen stove has bowed low to the microwave. Sometimes, changes are good. Power steering for cars, air conditioning for homes and indoor plumbing are a few good changes that come to mind. The landline phone, tethered to the wall or permanently in place on a table, is now a distant memory for some of us, and the younger generation has no idea what it would be like to have to stay in one place in order to talk on the phone. Today's cellphone has become as much a part of a person's anatomy as their fingers and toes. They can't keep the device out of their hands. The old landline phone used to ring and everyone in the family would ignore it because they had better things to do than talk on the phone. Caller ID had not become the norm, and you didn't know who was calling. It could be Aunt Bessie, who wanted to tell you all about her arthritis – again.

Weather permitting, all kids were outside, running and playing, and having a great time socializing with their friends. A physical friend, one you could pitch a baseball to, is far better than a thumbs-up, smiley face friend you haven't seen in 50-plus years. For the boys, climbing the highest tree in the neighborhood or playing football behind the old church building was the best of all worlds. The girls would help their mom bake cookies or play dress-up with their friends. It was real face time, not imaginary, like we have today.

At meal times, the kitchen table was ablaze with chatter, each one telling their stories of the day – real happenings they wanted and needed to share. Today's technology is somewhat alarming. The other day, in a local restaurant, I witnessed a man take a picture of his meal and send it to someone. When he had devoured it, he took a picture of his clean plate and sent another picture, presumably to the same person. Really!!! That's the best you can do with your time? Heaven help us.

Gene Vickers

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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