

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## Faith ... Understanding

Where Faith Meets Understanding

By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher

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



This past Saturday marked a special day of celebration in Jewish communities around the world.

It was the 18th day of the month of Elul on the Hebrew calendar, known as "Chai Elul," a day that commemorates the birthdays of two influential figures in Jewish history: the Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer), the founder of the Chassidic movement, and the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi), who established the Chabad branch of Chassidism. Often referred to as the "birthdays of the two great luminaries" in acknowledgment of their lasting impact, Chai Elul holds deep spiritual significance and brings a unique energy to the month of Elul, which leads up to the Jewish New Year that will begin next Wednesday evening.

The number 18, when spelled in the original Hebrew, can be rearranged to spell the word "Chai," meaning "alive." Chai Elul is seen as a day that breathes life and vitality into the spiritual preparations of Elul, a month dedicated to reflection, self-improvement, and reconnecting with one's inner purpose ahead of the New Year, where we reaffirm our relationship and connection to G-d.

Chai Elul symbolizes two essential aspects of spiritual practice: faith and understanding.

The teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, who lived in the 18th century, brought new vitality to Jewish life by emphasizing a deeper, more personal connection with the divine. In a world where scholarship and hierarchy often determined one's spiritual worth, the Baal Shem Tov flipped the script. He taught that one doesn't need to be a scholar or a religious elite to have a meaningful connection with God; everyone can cultivate a joyful, personal relationship with the divine. For the Baal Shem Tov, faith was not just a belief but a living force that transcends the limits of logic and reason, infusing everyday life with purpose and meaning.

The concept of faith goes beyond mere belief. It involves cultivating an active and engaged relationship with the divine, much like developing a skill through practice. The Baal Shem Tov encouraged people to see faith as a pathway to accessing their inner spiritual potential and seeing G-dliness in every aspect of their lives. In his view, a life guided by faith allows one to tap into a source of endless energy and inspiration, regardless of circumstances.

However, the journey of faith is not without its challenges. While faith connects us to something greater than ourselves, it can sometimes feel distant or abstract, creating a depressing gap between the infinite potential of the soul and our everyday awareness. The Alter Rebbe, another pivotal figure in Jewish thought, addressed this by integrating faith with understanding. His approach, known as Chabad Chassidism, encourages bringing spiritual insights into the intellectual faculties of the mind - wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

The Alter Rebbe's teachings offer a way to internalize faith, turning it into a conscious, deliberate practice. Instead of relying solely on moments of spiritual inspiration, Chabad philosophy empowers individuals to develop a consistent and thoughtful approach to their spiritual growth. By engaging the intellect, one can transform faith from an abstract concept into a lived reality, creating a more sustained and meaningful connection with the divine.

This approach highlights the unique contributions of both the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe: while the Baal Shem Tov taught the importance of serving a higher purpose and truly living with G-d, the Alter Rebbe provided a framework for how to do so. Together, they created a roadmap for personal growth that combines the heart and the mind, emotion and reason.

Chai Elul serves as a reminder of these teachings and the renewed spiritual energy they bring to this time of year. Jewish tradition teaches that a soul's source radiates more intensely on its birthday, amplifying the impact of the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe's contributions during this period. As the New Year approaches, this is a time for reflection and preparation for people of all faiths, an opportunity to deepen one's relationship with the divine and take proactive steps toward personal and spiritual growth.

Ultimately, Chai Elul calls for action. It encourages each of us, regardless of our background or beliefs, to find ways to bring light and goodness into the world. As we prepare for the new year, we are reminded that even small acts of kindness, understanding, and compassion can have a profound impact on our lives and the lives of those around us. This day inspires us to renew our efforts, focus on what truly matters, and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead, with the hope for a year filled with peace, health, and happiness for all.

Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer serving spiritual seekers of all persuasions on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer serving communities throughout the regional South. You can reach them at y@tasteoforah.org.

## 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



## Shelter From The Storm

"How did you go bankrupt?" Bill asked.

"Two ways," Mike said. "Gradually and then suddenly."

This exchange is from Hemingway's book, "The Sun Also Rises," and it anticipates the more recent use of "slowly, then all at once," which is a concise description of the way we often experience change. Things that seem to happen suddenly are often years in the making, like a rusted bolt that gives way unexpectedly or a seed that sprouts overnight after germinating underground for years.

Indeed, black swan events, unforeseen accidents, and chain reactions do exist. Disruptive technologies have the potential to transform the economic landscape almost instantaneously, and economics is closely intertwined with social change. Yet, even disruptive technology represents only the tip of the pyramid, beneath which is a broadening base that was essential for reaching the pinnacle.

Change was the topic of conversation recently as I chatted with a good friend of many years who, unfortunately and like too many others, lives too far away to get up to the mischief we once enjoyed. We were lamenting the national obsession with opinions, especially opinions about politics, and the persistent ill will which accompanies the ways and means the majority of us now employ to "be heard."

"I don't remember anyone who cared that much about politics 'back in the day,' do you? I mean, sometimes we would talk about it, agree or disagree, crack a joke or an insult and then go on. It never scratched the surface, but now you can't say anything without cutting someone."

"Maybe we had thicker skins back then, but I think it just wasn't that important. You surely didn't judge someone by how they voted, and the vast majority of the time you didn't know how they voted because no one ever said. That was something private."

The consensus among my handful of friends who pay attention, read history, and exercise reason, goats in a vast herd of sheep, is that this particular "slowly to suddenly" process began just over a generation ago when the first popular web browser, Mosaic, was released in 1993, the year that the World Wide Web became readily accessible.

A decade later, the trailblazing social media platform MySpace emerged, followed by the launch of Facebook the next year. Since 2007, Facebook has been a dominant force in social media, boasting 2.9 billion monthly active users. However, YouTube now draws 2.5 billion, Instagram also has 2.5 billion, WhatsApp has 2 billion, TikTok has 1.04 billion, WeChat has 1.3 billion, among others, totaling 5.17 billion people who publicly and frequently share their opinions. Currently, sixty-four percent of humanity is keen to tell you what it thinks and feels.

This is just another opinion among the billions, but I think that social media broke many things. It broke privacy. It broke discretion, and broke before we speak. It broke accountability for what we say. It broke humility. It broke patience, and for many it broke peace of mind and mental health. Finally, as an amplifier of partisan politics, social media, along with the concentrated application of heavily manipulated information services, may be breaking our civil society.

As a disruptive technology, information technology certainly got the "disruption" part down pat. What will be rebuilt from the wreckage remains to be seen. I am often reminded of that cautionary tale in Genesis about the Tower of Babel. Substitute the World Wide Web for the Tower, and witness another unfolding of pride and arrogance ungoverned by humility. Witness also the inevitable grasping for power by those who seek to control this concentration of human energy and focus it on their own goals.

We can't escape it, or at least the effects of it, even if we're not actively contributing, and we ignore it at our peril. It's like the rain that falls on the just and the unjust. But we can make sure our roof doesn't leak, and we don't have to go out into the storm unprotected. Nothing is forcing us to stare into the downpour until our eyes bleed, and perhaps the best shelter from the storm is all the things we did with the time we had before the rain started to fall.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

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P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546  
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## Leaf Color

With the cooler temperatures arriving, Fall is on everyone's mind. A big part of that is the change in leaf color. Our peak leaf color time is usually in mid-October. In the mountains the colors can make a beautiful sight. But why don't evergreens lose their leaves, and why are there all the different colors? Let's talk about it so that as the leaves change this year you can show off your scientific knowledge to your friends!

Firstly, leaves can change color for a variety of reasons. Disease, drought, nutrient deficiency among other things are all reasons why leaves can change colors. In the plants cells there is a chemical called chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is crucial to the plant. Chlorophyll converts the light energy into chemical energy in a process called photosynthesis. That chemical energy is used by the plant for growth and reproduction. If you eat a plant then you're ingesting that energy too. If you eat an animal that has been eating plants you're still ingesting that energy. Photosynthesis is an amazing process that is one of the biggest building blocks of life.

The chlorophyll can absorb many wavelengths of light. However, the green wavelengths are not absorbed but reflected. This gives leaves the green color that we see. Next to the chlorophyll in the plant leaves there are other chemicals that serve as a buffer to protect the chlorophyll. These other chemicals are pigments and they absorb the wavelengths of light that would be dangerous to the chlorophyll. These pigments vary in the color that they reflect from yellow to orange to red.

As the temperature starts to drop and the days get shorter, chlorophyll will start to break down in the leaves and stop converting light energy to chemical energy. During the growing season, there is so much chlorophyll in the leaves that the green color overpowers the pigments yellow to orange. However, with the chlorophyll beginning to break down, the pigment's coloring begins to show through. Different species of plants will have different levels of chlorophyll. The mixing of chlorophyll and pigment will result in the different colors of leaves that we see in the fall. The weather can affect the intensity of the leaf color. Colors will be more intense with rainy and overcast days.

While the leaves are changing color, the tree will also begin to create a special layer of cells at the point of attachment for the leaf to the tree. This layer of cells will seal the tree off from the leaf so that an open wound is not left when the leaf falls by its own weight.

Not all trees lose their leaves in the fall. Evergreens such as pines, hemlocks, hollies, and rhododendrons have a thicker coating of wax around their leaves. All leaves have a thin coating of wax that is used to protect them from drying out. On evergreen trees, the wax coating is thicker and can protect the leaves through the winter. Evergreens will still lose leaves, but they don't lose them all at one time. They'll completely replace all of their leaves over a period of 2-4 years.

This year it seems like some trees are turning color and dropping leaves sooner than other years. This is likely because of the drought that we have had this year and last year. The droughts have put the trees under stress, leading to less uniform leaf drop.

If you have questions about leaf color contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

## Letters To The Editor

### Do the Math

Dear Editor,

V.P. Harris states that the foundation of her presidential campaign is to increase taxes on corporations to benefit the middle class. Won't work. Those corporations will, as part of a free market, pass through to the consumer (i.e., the middle class) the expenses (i.e., more taxes) those corporations pay; it's basic economic principle that "the consumer ultimately pays." Thus, the middle class (i.e., those consumers) will actually pay an indirect tax (another economic principle), and they will not really receive the benefits V.P. Harris promises. Accordingly, this additional inflation will ultimately be borne by the middle class. Another example of if it's too good to be true, it probably isn't.

Claude Spears

### Eternity Is Calling

Dear Editor,

Not many people think about eternity, because they don't think there is such a thing when one passes on. When life is over here, that's it. Show is over. No more worries or pain to bear. I lived a good life while here on earth. What more could I ask for? In God's word, the Bible, eternity in the Book of Revelation tells us a different version of life after death. When a person dies, their bodies go back into the ground and await the resurrection of a glorious new body, like Jesus has, immortal without sin for eternity. Eternity has a record of your past, of what you have done whether good or bad. A record of your present life and how you used your life, whether good or bad, and lastly God has a record of your future life to come.

I know that this eternity thing sounds like an outer space Star War saga that seems too impossible to believe, but this is where faith comes into play, that if you take time to read God's word in the Book of Revelation, which speaks of eternity to come, when Jesus Christ returns in all His glory above the earth and at the trumpet call, Jesus will gather His chosen ones, those who have accepted Him as their Savior and Redeemer of mankind. No other religion except Christianity can make such a claim and can back it up with Scripture that is the truth of the gospel message of Jesus Christ if only one will believe in the saving grace of a loving Father in heaven who awaits our arrival. It's all true, folks. God said it, and when God speaks, it is a done deal for eternity.

Frank F. Combs

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Phone: (706) 896-4454 Fax: (706) 896-1745 Email: tcherald@windstream.net

Or mail to: PO Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546