

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Joy Breaks Barriers

Joy Breaks Barriers This Troubled Holiday Season

By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher

As the holiday season approaches, many of us eagerly anticipate the warm embrace of joy and happiness that typically accompanies this time of year. We eagerly await the festive decorations, the cozy gatherings with loved ones, and the giving of thoughtful gifts. Perhaps it's a quirk of the calendar that somehow many faiths have celebrations in the winter months, be it Hanukkah, Christmas, or Kwanzaa – but it is truly wondrous that there is a joyous holiday for anyone to participate in this festive season.

Holiday cheer is the typical sentiment that defines the month of December, but for countless people, finding joy and happiness this year feels heavier and more challenging than ever. The global events of the last few months, coupled with the many domestic challenges many of us – or people we know – have been facing, have left us grappling with uncertainty and isolation, and confusion about how to celebrate the holidays in good conscience.

And yet we must. We must find that mental bandwidth to celebrate our traditional holidays guilt-free, because only with joy and purpose can we overcome any challenge or adversity.

Let's explore the importance of joy in Judaism, where the need to be happy is emphasized in many scriptures and teachings: Deuteronomy 28 warns the Jews of dire consequences if they do not serve G-d with happiness and gladness of heart. In Kings II, Chapter 3, we learn that even the prophet Elisha recognized the importance of joy in achieving prophecy. After King Yehoram of Israel aroused Elisha's wrath, a minstrel had to play before him to lift his spirits before he could attain prophecy once again. This story illustrates that a prophet could only connect with the divine when in a state of happiness. The Talmud further emphasizes the significance of joy by stating that the Divine Presence only rests on one who is joyous.

And finally in the daily morning prayer, we are commanded to "serve God with joy," as mentioned in Psalms 100. This commandment reminds us that joy is an integral part of our service to G-d. It is not enough to merely go through the motions; our hearts must be filled with joy and faith as we carry out our divine duties.

But why does God care about our mood? Why is it essential to serve Him with joy?

The answer is simple: Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi in his seminal work *The Tanya* explains that serving G-d without joy indicates a lack of faith. If someone is upset about their situation, and falls into a melancholic funk (excluding mental health conditions), they are in effect questioning the plan that G-d has for them.

In the midst of those "curve balls" which life throws at us, mustering the faith that it is G-d who has custom-made our challenges out of His love for us, invariably leads to joy, which is the secret to overcoming any challenge. The Jewish motto of "joy breaks all boundaries" endures, while negativity and pessimism lead to apathy, paralysis, and the abdication of personal responsibility.

This holiday season – precisely when the world feels dark and confusing – is a time for reflection, gratitude, and joy.

It's a time to thank G-d for and rejoice in the blessings that we have been granted – our families, our homes, our communities and other blessings we typically take for granted – and make an effort to share those blessings with others less fortunate than ourselves. Practicing this gratitude and taking stock of all the good things in our lives, while engaging in acts of service and community, will foster a sense of contentment and joy while making our challenges seem trivial and easily fixable in relation to all the positive things going on. Embracing traditional celebrations with family and friends can serve as an anchor in these troubled days.

Joy is not a mere fleeting emotion but a profound state of being that sustains us through adversity. It serves as a beacon of hope in the darkest of times, reminding us that even in the midst of turmoil we can find light and purpose. By embracing joy and gratitude, we can overcome the long winter darkness, together.

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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.

Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month: School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
Every Tuesday: Story Time for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
First Tuesday of each month: Hiaw. City Council... City Hall YH City Council... YH City Hall	6 pm 6:30 pm
Second Tuesday of each month: Conventions & Visitors Board... Civic Center	8:30 am
Second Wednesday of each month: Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month: Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month: 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



Divider-in-Chief

For the last three years, President Biden has intentionally sowed division in our nation. The most powerful example of the Biden Administration's callous agenda is now unfolding just outside of Washington.

United States Congressman
Representative
Andrew Clyde



In the coming days, the Biden Administration intends to remove the Reconciliation Monument from Arlington National Cemetery. The monument was erected in 1914 to commemorate reconciliation and national unity after the Civil War. Designed by a Jewish-American sculptor, the memorial is topped with a woman crowned by an olive wreath to symbolize peace.

As evidenced by its obsession with removing the Reconciliation Monument, the Biden Administration doesn't want peace, unity, and reconciliation; they want discord, division, and destruction.

The Biden Administration's disastrous decision to remove the Reconciliation Monument was made possible by the infamous Naming Commission. As you may know, the Naming Commission was established by the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to recommend the removal of "all names, symbols, displays, monuments, and paraphernalia that honor or commemorate the Confederate States of America." Notably, President Trump vetoed the FY21 NDAA due to concerns about the Naming Commission and its attempts to rewrite history – yet the Uniparty overrode his veto.

In the years following this misguided move, the U.S. Army has implemented the Naming Commission's recommendations, including the renaming of numerous military installations. As you know, they even attempted to rename our own Lake Lanier and Buford Dam, as these are the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' civil works projects. But so far, we have successfully stopped these efforts. Yet the Commission also recommended the removal of the Arlington Reconciliation Monument – but the memorial doesn't meet the key criteria for this ill-advised guidance.

First and foremost, the Reconciliation Monument does not commemorate the Confederacy; it commemorates national unity. Furthermore, the Naming Commission's authority explicitly prohibits the desecration of grave sites. Considering the hundreds of gravestones encircling the monument and the four grave sites at the base of the memorial, it would be impossible for these graves to remain untouched. Undoubtedly, the removal of the monument alone constitutes a desecration of these graves.

Due to my sincere concerns with the Naming Commission's flawed recommendation to remove the Reconciliation Monument in spite of these facts, I introduced an amendment to the FY24 Defense Appropriations bill to prohibit funds from being used to dismantle the memorial. The full House passed my amendment by voice, with no opposition. Shortly after, we passed the entire Defense Appropriations bill – with bipartisan support – in September.

Since Congress is still considering this single-subject spending bill, I led over 40 of my House Republican colleagues in urging the Department of Defense to halt its plans to remove the monument until the FY24 appropriations process is complete. I strongly believe that the Department of Defense must comply with this request or risk disrespecting and violating the principle of separation of powers between Congress and the Executive, outlined in the Constitution.

Yet on Friday, December 15th, the Secretary of the Army responded to my letter confirming that the U.S. Army intends to remove the Reconciliation Monument by the January 1st, 2024, deadline – citing the severely flawed FY21 NDAA. Over the last few days, efforts have started setting up to carry out this despicable effort at Arlington National Cemetery. But thankfully, they have been temporarily prevented from executing the Biden Administration's vile efforts.

Yesterday, a Trump-appointed Judge, Rossie Alston Jr., issued a temporary restraining order, halting the removal of the Reconciliation Monument at Arlington National Cemetery pending further court action.

This was a major win – but our fight is far from over. Please know that I will continue closely monitoring the situation and doing everything in my power to protect the Arlington Reconciliation Monument. Because our nation, our history, and our unity are worth fighting for. Soli Deo Gloria, Andrew S. Clyde

Letters To The Editor

Inspiration of Christmas

Dear Editor,

The last time I was here, the rental house next door was vacant. It's a small house, and repairs needing to be made were obvious, even from where I was parked. Next door to the rental house is a business where my wife likes to shop.

I find myself again doing the husband thing sitting in the car while she shops. Today the house next door has a tenant. A transformation has taken place. The house is the same and the repairs that need to be done are still visible. However, the tenant has been inspired by the season, and it's truly amazing what the miracle of Christmas can do, even to an old rental house.

I no longer see paint peeling and boards cracked. I no longer see shingles on the roof needing to be replaced and a window with a broken pane of glass covered with plastic. I see instead the ribbons and bows, placed not in fir or spruce trees, but in crepe myrtles. There is a Frosty in the yard and a small manger scene in a window. One string of Christmas lights is across the front porch.

The brush of Christmas has transformed the ordinary into extraordinary. The imperfections of the rental house are overshadowed by the celebration of the birth of the Christ child. Lives are also changed by this Christ, and imperfections and mistakes made in our lives are no longer visible because of the Cross and the forgiveness it extends at Christmas time and all year long.

May the Spirit of Christmas and the Christ of Christmas visit each of us this season, making us more like Him and less like the world we live in.

Gene Vickers

Twelve More Days

Give me at least twelve days of Christmas, and I'm not taking down the decorations on the 26th. That's Boxing Day, and the Second Day of Christmas, well deserving of a bit of holly and a twinkling light. The number of homes and businesses still decorated during the first week of January tells me I'm not alone in my desire to extend the season.

Our time on this earth is fleeting enough without the tyranny of urgency that permeates this age. Holidays and celebrations, our moments of vacation and renewal, are scarce compared to the hours of work and worry we endure. Then there are the commutes between those hours, or as a friend once said, "I drive to work so I can afford a car and gasoline so I can drive to work."

Even the time we lie down to sleep is bathed in a harsh glare of drama and doom from the ubiquitous devices we use to stay connected to...something. Ancient societies we consider "primitive" worked fewer hours than we do, and they slept better.

All too soon the work week begins after the holidays, and we have to pay for the gifts we bought. The pressure and conditioning to buy for Christmas started in September. Then came Black Friday, which mutated into Cyber Monday, then Cyber Week, then Special Holiday Savings, Extended and the After Christmas Sale. The smartphone that was \$899.99 before the big sale was suddenly the doorbuster special at only \$999.99 – marked down from \$1299.99. Cash or credit? Credit, of course. The holiday that invites us to replace our materialistic concerns with spiritual ones now serves to further obligate us to the material.

The remedy, while difficult in a material world, is at least uncomplicated. We can refuse to borrow money to pay for things we don't need but have been conditioned to want. We can learn to want what we already have. We can spend less than we earn and invest the difference wisely and dispassionately. We can remember that we resolved to do all these things last year and try again in the next.

Even though we may again be part of the traffic on the way to work on the 26th of December or the 2nd of January, there is no externally activated kill switch that cuts off the spirit of the holiday. We control that switch, though the combined efforts of all that struts and frets urges us to throw it, to click on to the next needful thing and the next crisis.

Join me in defying that urging. On this minute miracle world in a limitless expanse of eternal, unfathomable mystery, we can try and try again to preserve and recreate the moment of gratitude and childlike awe which the holidays bring, and we can leave our Christmas trees up until the needles drop off if we want to.

Plan Ahead

Winter provides some down time from the garden each year. If you have been a gardener for a long time you may be using the winter months to plan ahead and select which varieties you're going to grow next year. You could be planning some additions or trying to figure out how to make your garden more successful next year. The best gardens are ones that were planned out thoughtfully to try and mitigate problems before they happen. Every gardener will tell you that you learn something new each year. Trying to incorporate each year's lesson into next year's garden will help you plan for success. Let's talk about some tips to plan your garden next year.

If this is going to be your first garden, or your first garden in the red clays of Georgia, I would encourage you to start small. Sometimes we think that for it to be worth it, you need to plant a big garden. I would argue that a small garden that makes you happy is worth more than a big garden that you dread. If you start small you can always increase the size of the garden next year.

If this is going to be your first garden or you are expanding an existing garden think about how you're going to water it. Some years we have plenty of rain and water is not an issue, but if you have young plants you will most likely need to water them at some point. If you can put in irrigation that's great. If you're going to water by hand and the spigot is far away, think about how much time it's going to take to water.

Weeds are the bane of every gardener. Try to plan ahead about how you're going to take care of weeds. Can you put mulch down? How about landscape fabric? Will you be using the Santa Claus method (hoe, hoe, hoe)? Planning ahead to control weeds can save you a lot of time in the long run.

Make sure that you put the right plant in the right place. Planning the layout based on sunlight, moisture, and space requirements lends itself to long term success. If you're planting trees or shrubs think about where they will cast shade as they grow and mature. Will they begin to shade out other plants? Will they have enough space in that spot? Not all annuals grow to be the same size. In a vegetable garden where sunlight is limited think about how tall corn or pole beans will get. Will they shade out plants below them?

A soil test is a good idea for any garden, but in particular if you are breaking new ground. The pH of the soil, and the nutrients in the soil will have a huge impact on how successful your garden is. Take 8-10 random subsamples from around your garden. Each subsample should be from the top 4-6 inches of soil. Combine these together to make a representative sample. We need 2 cups to be able to run the test. Bring your soil sample into the Extension Office. We charge \$12 for a soil test in Union and Towns.

If you have questions about planning ahead for a garden contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

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