

Opinions

Everybody has one...

January...

January, be prepared, drink hot chocolate and rest

January always brings snow and ice unless you live in the most southern part of the United States. Even then, you aren't guaranteed to escape January without some harsh weather.

This current mess that came from the west has piled about 8 inches of snow and ice on us. Keeping us inside for a couple of days. So far, we've only been without power for one hour, but many others have not been as fortunate.

The best we can do is prepare and hunker down. We need alternative lighting and heat sources. You can almost count on the power to go out sometime in January. Especially if you aren't prepared. It's better to be over prepared and not need it than to be underprepared and in danger of freezing to death.

This seems to be one of the golden rules of life. Be prepared. We spend our lives studying and thinking about being prepared. School and education are about learning, developing and training. We study for knowledge but also to be prepared. We try to save money so that we might be prepared for the time when we aren't able to make any more. The team that wins the game is the team who works hard to prepare mentally and physically.

Every aspect of life is about preparing. The musician, athlete, actor, politician, butcher, baker, candlestick maker, homemaker, and so forth must have a rigid daily routine to experience success. One reality of life is that there is much for which we can't prepare.

We hear about cancer but are never prepared for such a diagnosis. We aren't prepared for breaking a bone but then are suddenly faced with months of recuperation. Accidents and hard times can come suddenly and painfully. These are the things in life that come at us suddenly and out of nowhere. Although they are painful, we have no choice but to face the agony of whatever it is and try to work through it one day at a time.

We prepare for life and we should prepare for death. As long as we live, we have all that comes with life. What about death? We must be prepared for that as well. There are funeral plans we need to make, but most importantly, our eternal plans must be made.

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Guest Editorial

By Dr. Glenn Mollette

The Unfinished Chat

She was a young woman, maybe early thirties. We were chatting in a public place... small talk. When our conversation turned Godward I asked, "Do you have a faith?" She pondered, then looked at me. "I think I can honestly say I've given it my best effort..." Just then we were interrupted, and our brief chat was over. My forlorn feeling was like waving goodbye to a train leaving me at the station.

If she had been available and willing, I would have asked more questions. What effort did she make? What expectations weren't met? You really can't help someone on their spiritual journey without quite a bit of listening. I had already reminded her that God loves her. The rest of the conversation might have been about why someone would return that love.

Perhaps I would have explained that we live in a moral universe and why it matters. Think about your own sense of right and wrong. You have a conscience, an innate sense of morality. If you think that Hitler ought not have committed violence, oppression, and hate, why isn't that just an opinion? Isn't nature about survival of the fittest? Yet you know that oppression, slavery, and genocide are absolutely wrong regardless of nature or how others feel. That implies a transcendent moral order and a moral law-giver. His moral standard is perfection, which eludes your best efforts. That matters to a holy God. You need to be reconciled to Him. You need a Savior, Jesus.

Jesus encountered some less-than-perfect people. Even as a certain woman washed and anointed His feet, His dinner companions wondered if He knew what "sort of person" she was. Of course He did. He turned their concerns into a story about two debtors. One owes much, the other little. The lender forgives both debts. Point being, the one who was forgiven much would have more love toward his lender.

Then Jesus made the story personal. He pointed out that His hosts offered none of the usual gestures of kindness when He entered the home. It was the woman who showed great love toward Him. She loved much because "her sins, which are many, have been forgiven." They did not love because they sensed no need for forgiveness from God (Luke 7).

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



From Your Commissioner

The county administration underwent a significant leadership change as Larry Garrett retired from his position as county manager. Tony Hughes has assumed the role of county manager, officially beginning his duties on January 7, 2025.

Tony comes to Union County with previous experience in construction, engineering, and manufacturing. He has also been directly involved with county recreation sports for many years.

A native to Union County, he brings with him a deep understanding of the local culture and community that will undoubtedly benefit his roles in managing the county's physical assets and working with county employees to serve residents and visitors alike. He has already begun working on county projects that further goals I mentioned in last week's column: 1) fiscal responsibility and 2) transparency governance.

This transition marks an important milestone in our county's administration. Mr. Garrett's retirement concludes his years of dedicated service to our community, while Mr. Hughes brings fresh perspective to the position. The seamless transition ensures continuity in county operations and services to residents served by Union County Government.

We welcome Mr. Hughes as he takes on his new responsibilities in managing county operations and implementing policy directives through the Commissioner's Office.

Union County Commissioner

Harold Collins



Rewarding Oneself

Is it not strange that as intellectual human beings we are more prone to reward our cats and dogs for performing good deeds than ourselves? Quite mystifying. Whenever our lovable pets demonstrate what we expect or even just show unconditional love, we dig into their bags of treats to reward them, and not just once a day but countless times each day. Why are we more apt to reward our pets than ourselves?

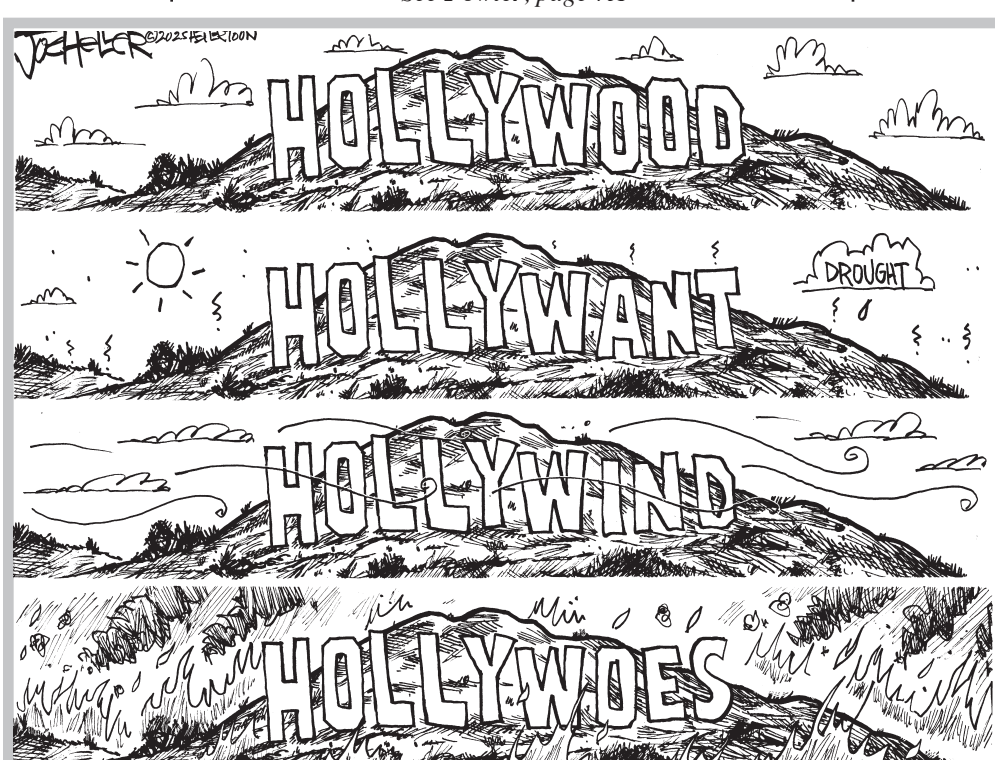
The very idea of rewarding ourselves for an accomplished task seems uncanny, even bizarre, because we are in the habit of not doing so. Furthermore, it seems so alien that mundane responsibilities warrant some type of reward: feeding the pets, straightening up the house, raking leaves, or cleaning the interior of our cars deserve our notice and our pats on the back.

Why does it sound so strange to plan to reward ourselves for accomplishing a worthwhile goal? When was the last time you rewarded

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Successful Mental Health

Dr. James Ray Ashurst PH.D.



Letters to the Editor

Transparency Please

Dear Editor,

I find it both interesting and a little perplexing that newly elected County Commissioner Collins, who ran on a platform of reducing taxes, has not publicly explained exactly where these cuts are coming from.

Will he dismantle the library? Close the pool? Close the Byron Herbert Reece Farm & Heritage Center? Cut back on youth sports and recreational projects? Cut back on funding the jail? Eliminate jobs in the Sheriff's Office? What about the recycling programs? Union County is in the process of acquiring a new "bundler" machine that will accept all kinds of plastics and not just the #1's and #2's currently accepted.

County residents both full and part-time probably would not be in favor of closing any or all of them to meet new cost-cutting measures. I along with every other Union County resident deserve to know exactly what our future holds. Transparency please, Mr. Collins.

Steve Psiaki

Ode To Mom

Dear Editor,

I remember when I reached 36 and my mom was reaching 36 years old much earlier in my childhood. Did she act like me? She seemed older but never old. A teenage bride of the '50s, she shared many of her thoughts with me. Although mom always seemed cool listening to my radio rock station of WFIL, she told me of how she grew as a young parent and a wiser adult.

My father's mother, her mother-in-law, was very practical in all areas. In 1978, I spent a summer with my Grandmom Rand while attending summer school at Temple University in downtown Philadelphia. Having thought

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Pete Hegseth

Dear Editor,

A recent reader opined that President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Defense is unqualified.

Perhaps if he was a four-star career Pentagon politician or a former CEO of Lockheed Martin, he would be qualified.

But it is Trump's intention to shake up the bureaucracy and flush out the corruption in the Civil Service and the hierarchy of the Armed Services.

As a twice decorated (Bronze Stars for valor, not time served) Army Reserve Veteran, Hegseth is the right man to strengthen and sup-

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Charity Isn't About Them...

Charity Isn't About Them - It's About You
By Yonatan Hamburger and Tzali Reicher
Why does giving feel so good?

It's one of those universal truths we all experience: the joy of giving often outweighs the joy of receiving. There's a very human moment of pride that everyone feels when we see how we've helped someone, whether it's a spouse recognizing your efforts around the house or the gratitude expressed by someone in need, even when they receive just a dollar. In fact, the legendary Jewish scholar Maimonides taught that the highest level of charity is to give anonymously, allowing the giver to forgo the ego boost they receive from being recognized and thanked for their assistance.

Whether it's assisting a friend in need, contributing to charity, or volunteering, the act of giving fills us with a sense of purpose and connection. But why is this? Why does giving matter so much - not just to the receiver but to the giver?

It's tempting to view charity and kindness as one-way streets. Someone requires help; you step in to provide it. It certainly sounds simple enough, but if you look a little deeper, you'll find that the giver often walks away with something far more profound than the recipient. This dynamic lies at the core of a well-known teaching in the Talmud: "More than the calf needs to nurse, the cow needs to suckle."

This phrase isn't just about animals - it's about us. It reminds us that giving is not a burden; it's a necessity. The cow doesn't feed the calf out of obligation but from a deeper desire to nurture. Similarly, we are inclined to feel fulfilled when we give to others.

Consider the world around us. According to the U.N., we produce enough food to feed everyone on the planet, yet over 800 million people go hungry every day. It's not a problem of scarcity - it's a problem of distribution. You might wonder, why doesn't G-d bypass the middleman and ensure everyone has enough to eat? After all, if He can create the world, He can surely organize a more efficient system.

This leads us to a captivating lesson in the book of Exodus, where G-d instructs the Israelites to present Him with an offering. The verse says, "Take for me an offering... from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity."

Why does the Torah say, "Take for Me"? Shouldn't it say, "Give to Me"? Isn't the essence of charity about giving, not taking?

The wording here is intentional and conveys a profound message: when we give, we're not just giving - we're also receiving. G-d

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Echos from Sinai

"Torah for Everyone" Rabbi Yonatan Hamburger



All Around the Farm

I have recently been on a couple of walks that were interesting for a variety of reasons. The first is the beauty of the mountains, and this time of year you can see things that cannot be viewed in the spring and summer due to the amount of foliage on the trees. Wintertime is a time that waterfalls can easily be viewed, and in the summer you might not even know the waterfall is located nearby. Second, it is easy to locate old homelands in the winter also due to a lack of foliage on the trees. This winter I have found myself in a couple of these situations.

The other day I received a phone call from my friend Milton Bradley asking me if I wanted to see something special. One thing I have learned during the last few years is if Milton suggests that I need to see something, it will be worth it to go. So, we drove over to Track-rock Gap and walked west and over another gap into the Bitter Creek watershed. We continued down into a cove crossing a branch and coming upon an old homestead of which the only thing left was part of a fireplace. The mud chinking of the fireplace was long gone. The top stone of the fireplace was a long and thick, rectangular stone which was very large. It would have taken three to four men to even pick it up, and it was 6-7 feet off the ground.

We also found the foundations of the old home indicating a large home for its time. Most older home sites you find are small due to the length of the logs used to build the home. This one was much larger than those, indicating that the home was probably built of milled lumber. Close to the middle of the structure we found what appeared to be a root cellar. We also found a spring nearby which had been walled in with rocks and probably had a small spring house built over it at one time. As I took all this in I tried to imagine what it all must have once looked without the present trees being a part of everything.

The area around the old home site looked like good bottom land. As we crossed the cove we began finding piles of rock which had been removed from long-ago cultivated fields. Before we made our way back up the cove we found a number of rock terraces which had been used to slow the flow of water in an effort to prevent erosion from destroying the family's cultivated fields. Being as close to Christmas as it is, I wondered about the family sitting around the fireplace and singing Christmas carols while decorating a Christmas Tree. I wondered about a father reading the story of the birth of Jesus out loud to

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Blueberry Pruning

Blueberries grow pretty well in Georgia. Rabbiteye blueberries are native to the southeast, so they're well adapted to our climate. Let's talk specifically about pruning blueberries.

Blueberries don't need to be pruned every year to be fruitful. However, if you start doing some cane renewal pruning every year on a mature plant the bushes will be more fruitful and have more longevity. The ideal time to prune blueberries is late winter because the plants are dormant. February is late winter for us in the mountains. Plants in their dormant state are going to be less prone to infection or stress from the pruning.

Blueberry is a multi-stemmed bush. Each one of the stems that comes out of the ground is called a cane. Cane renewal pruning is removing old canes from the plant so that there is space for new canes to grow. Ideally, under cane renewal pruning you'll remove old canes each year so that in five years all the canes on the plant will be completely different. Each year go through the plant and cut out the oldest canes that you find. Also, remove any diseased or dead canes. Ideally, you don't want to remove more than 25% of the canes in a single year. If you have a blueberry bush that hasn't been pruned for a couple of years it may take a couple years to get it back into shape. If you have a blueberry bush that hasn't been pruned for many, many years cane renewal pruning probably isn't going to get the plants back into shape. In that situation, I'd recommend something that may seem very drastic, but is better for the plants in the end. Mow the bushes down to the ground. Mature plants will be able to take this hit, and put up new suckers, that turn into canes. This is going to give you fresh growth, and a new healthier plant. You'll go without blueberries for a couple of years. Therefore, if you have several plants that need to be mowed, you could do a couple a year, until they are all back under control.

New plants should be pruned to have the healthiest plants. Prune back 2/3 of the top growth on bare root plants, and 1/2 of the top growth on potted plants. If the new plant has many canes prune out all but 1-3 of the best looking ones. You also don't want a first year plant to produce fruit, so pick off any flower buds. If you prune plants like this the first year, the second year won't need much pruning. In the second year pick off flower buds again, and remove any diseased canes. The third year, remove diseased canes, but you can leave the flower buds on vigorous shoots. The fourth year, the plant should be able to handle full crop, but if you have some

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Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



North Georgia News

Published since 1909 • Legal Organ of Union County

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Website: www.nganews.com • Email: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com • Mail: P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514

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Publication No: 001505

Advertising, News deadlines Friday at 4 p.m. • Mail Service for all subscriptions except 30512, 30514 & 30572 (Union County) - One Year \$45 INCLUDING UNION COUNTY CUSTOMER REQUEST MAIL SERVICE. In county, carrier delivered subscription is \$10. All subscriptions must be paid in advance. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is published weekly by NGN/TCH, Inc., 266 Cleveland Street, Blairsville, Georgia, 30512. Entered as Second Class Matter as of Dec. 24, 1988, at the Post Office in Blairsville. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement.

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his children. I also wondered about the joys and pains of life the family experienced during their lives in the old homesite. After posting photographs of the area on my Facebook page, a knowledgeable friend told me that the place was owned by a man named Brown. Although I do not know much about the old homeplace, I do know that Mr. Brown must have been a hard worker due to the rocks he piled up or stacked all over the farm. I also know he had a beautiful place deep in that cove around the upper end of Bitter Creek.

I enjoy various things to keep me occupied, a couple of which are reading about the outdoors and the reading of topographic maps. I really like reading the older Outdoor Life Magazines, and I really enjoy reading a map. I enjoy reading a good map as much as most people enjoy reading a good book. Recently, my wife ordered a book for me titled "Goose Hunting" by Charles Elliott, who used to have a monthly column in the previously mentioned magazine. One of the chapters in this book was about some of his bobcat hunting adventures. One of those took him into the area around Slaughter Gap where he met a man named Fayette Fortenberry. He called the man the last of a vanishing breed. I pictured him as a lanky, long-legged mountain man that farmed in the area under Slaughter Gap over in the Suches area. After reading about Fortenberry, I laid aside the book and dug out a top map of the area around Slaughter Gap.

Just to the south of the Gap is another gap west of Blood Mountain called Bird Gap, and in this area I found an isolated waterfall on Blood Mountain Creek. I have a weakness for waterfalls and just had to go see it. One morn-

ing Milton Bradley, Tom Starrett and I went to the top of the waterfall. We admired the view but could not get to the bottom of it due to having to climb down a cliff face. We were running out of day light and had to leave. But seeing the waterfall kept nagging at me. The same friend previously mentioned had been to it and told me of another way to get to the falls, and I vowed to go back.

Ten days later found Tom Starrett and I hiking up the Slaughter Creek Trail toward Bird Gap and the A.T. We found the gap and eased off the trail toward where I thought we could find the falls. We soon found them, however, we had to negotiate that same cliff face to get down to the base of the falls. But, this time we had a chance. We figured that if we held to the trees we could inch our way down. As we made our way down off the lead and through an Ivy thicket, thoughts of Fayette Fortenberry raced through my mind and I halfway expected to see him as we passed through the thicket and walked around boulders as big as my house.

When we reached the bottom I found a boulder about 8-10 feet tall that I climbed up to make a photograph. I photographed not just one but, two waterfalls that came together to form Blood Mountain Creek. And everywhere I looked there were Ivy thickets and truck-sized boulders. This was a perfect place for bobcats and bobcat hunters. I believe Mr. Fortenberry chose a great place for his home. Tom and I ate lunch and watched the waterfall for a little while, and as we packed up for our return home he looked at me and said, "You know, one day we'll get too old to climb these mountains!"

Grinning, I responded, "Maybe, but not today."

Kramer... continued from Page 6A

of myself as a clean person around the house, I was not up to par on Saturdays when she announced that we clean the baseboards with a brush before dusting. But I leave that for another day and another story.

Back to the present gone by. One day, my mom told me how she was shocked and misunderstood why my Grandmom Rand was happy when her mother finally died of the crippling and unfair destiny she had witnessed with her mother's cancer. How could a daughter want her mom dead? My mom thought she was hearing something so horrible she could never wish that on anyone, much less her mother.

My mom's mother was quieter yet was a real businesswoman. My mom used to say she was the bad guy while my grandfather was able to be good-natured. Truth be told, if it weren't for her business savvy, the Milner Gas Station might have belled up long ago; it seemed Grandmom Milner kept their business afloat.

Life has a certain way of catching up to even the most naïve of us... time catches up quickly as every year after 80 feels like five years have passed (so I have been told). In the '90s, Grandmom Milner fell and was hospitalized. My husband and I visited her daily, even taking shifts when work did not allow us to arrive together due to strict visiting hours.

I was certain my grandmom would return home to the most basic microwave she never used and the TV we exchanged because she could not relate to the remote. My mother knew differently, and it shocked me. Always upbeat and filled with laughter, the silver lining was not presented to me on that day. My mom Renee looked at me and said my grandmother would never be coming back to her humble abode. I questioned her how she was so sure, and she told me that, given her mom's age of 89 years plus some, she could not live being fed by a tube among other things, no matter what the nurses said.

When my mom was called by the hospital when her mom died, she was awoken from a sound sleep in the middle of the night. She was alone and, upon hearing the news, told me she said thank you G-d and went back to sleep. I could

not imagine her doing that after hearing about my grandmother. I could never go back to sleep... but that is just me and my coping skillset.

Clocks move fast forward 20 plus years. I am on a plane taking my mom to Israel, which will be her final destination. Before leaving, she gave my brother and me a list of people to call when she died... much like the lists my Grandmom Rand used to go over with me upon her death. My mom lived a year in Israel with my sisters and their families. During that time, she attended a grandson's wedding and her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren's birthday parties and other happy occasions.

My brother and I talked to her and our overseas family by way of WhatsApp. Videos were posted of the family. The last video I saw of my mom was on a Saturday. Her back was turned, and she was walking with a walker down my younger sister Sharon's hallway. I got this feeling that by the next day, she would be off on another adventure. I told my husband of my premonition, and that I would not be teaching Sunday School. The next day, early Sunday morning, my brother called with the news I was waiting and hoping for. Afterwards, he and I made arrangements to go to Israel.

At the funeral, I knew I would not be visiting much so I filled a bottle with dirt that surrounded my mother's grave. My shirt was cut and the black ribbon held by a safety pin. I stayed there for a few days as family and friends visited my older sister Susan's home. We watched videos and laughed, shared stories, and my brother Joe and I brought home treasured reminders.

You may wonder the reason for this sudden recounting, but the answer is both simple and complex. Recently, my husband, son, and I saw another episode of the Lion King Saga. This time the theme centered on the Lion King's father, Mufasa. The movie was dedicated to the memory of James Earl Jones, the voice of Mufasa. As the movie says, all of us are in The Circle of Life.

And now you know the rest of my story. Don't forget to hug your kids and significant others. Until next time...

Lisa Kramer

Hambourger.. continued from Page 6A

doesn't need our charity; He's giving us the opportunity to be part of something bigger. The act of giving refines us and adds meaning and purpose to our lives.

In a sense, we are G-d's middlemen. We're here to make the world a kinder, more compassionate place. Think of it like being part of a massive distribution network. The "products" we're distributing aren't just material goods like food or money – they're also love, empathy, and con-

Fowler...

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If you want to "give it your best effort," contemplate morality and your need for forgiveness. Consider God's holiness and Jesus's sacrifice on the cross in your place. There you'll find your reason to believe and return God's love because He loved you first.

I hope our unfinished chat that day renewed the young woman's conversation with God. If she continues it, perhaps she will also hear the words Jesus said to a certain woman. "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Ashurst...

continued from Page 6A

yourself for accomplishing a goal?

"The reward for work well done is the opportunity to do more." (Jonas Salk)

Mollette...

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Where do you want to spend eternity? Consider, when it comes to the end of our lives and meeting God face to face. Look to him today and prepare your heart and mind. Embrace His gift to us in His son Jesus.

January won't last forever, and there is much excitement in January such as college basketball, NFL playoffs, my birthday if I live, the swearing in of our new President, a raise in Social Security, and many occasions to drink hot chocolate. Don't miss the hot chocolate and don't miss the opportunity to take some time for a few naps on these snowy days. God surely gave us January to hibernate a little and rest after the hectic holidays.

Chamber...

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separating the calendars into an "events" calendar and a "community" calendar to make it easier to find that fun event or that community gathering you would like to attend.

Also, a big shoutout to our first responder and road crews who work so hard to keep us safe and to make Life Better in Blairsville.

Tarter...

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port our men and women in our armed forces, without the Jacobin DEI nonsense currently undermining our National Security.

Hegseth is obviously well-lettered with a degree and a graduate degree from Princeton and Harvard respectively.

For too long we've suffered cabinet secretaries long on business interests and short on integrity, look no farther than our current massively incompetent Secretaries of Defense and of Homeland Security and the American deaths under their commands.

Hegseth is a well-spoken man who believes women should not be in combat due to current compromises on fitness and combat effectiveness. There are plenty of support functions ideally suited for our patriotic women in uniform without unnecessary risk to fellow troops.

Trump is appointing independent men and women for his administration, un beholden to former employers or influential corporate interests routinely infecting the Deep State. That's why Hegseth, Musk, Kennedy et al will refresh the government under the new President's watch.

J. Murray Tarter

Codependents

Anonymous

Weekly Meeting

Codependents Anonymous Meeting: Self-Help group offering a 12 Step Recovery Program meets on Tuesdays from 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. at Rivers of Peace, RCO 166 Josh Hall Road, Suite 4, Blue Ridge, GA 30513. All are welcome.

nection. By stepping into this role, we become active participants in the betterment of the world.

It's not just about meeting physical needs, either. Sure, a hungry person needs food, and a lonely person needs companionship. But on a deeper level, what we all crave – giver and receiver alike – is meaning. When we give, we tap into that need. It's not just about the recipient's gratitude but about fulfilling a purpose beyond ourselves.

Williams...

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weak looking canes, thin out the buds to prevent over fruiting, which can cause permanent bending of canes from the weight.

Each year after harvest is completed cut plants back so that they don't become too tall. Tall plants are more difficult to harvest for people; bears and birds probably won't have that same problem.

If you have questions about pruning blueberries, contact you County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

That warm glow we feel after being charitable isn't just the satisfaction of helping – it's the realization that you've made a difference in someone's life. You've gained something intangible yet incredibly valuable in giving: a sense of purpose.

Conversely, think about how many opportunities we miss when we don't give. Every unopened email from a charity, every ignored chance to help a neighbor, is a missed opportunity – not just for them but us. We lose out on the chance to be part of something greater, to connect with others, and to fulfill our higher calling as humans.

G-d could have set up a perfect system where everyone's needs are met without our involvement. But that's not the point of creation. The world isn't just a place to live. It's a place to grow, connect, and improve through our actions. Giving is how we do that, and it's how we transform the world into a kinder, more compassionate place.

There are plenty of opportunities to practice this principle, even those not financially related. While writing a check is undoubtedly

important, giving also happens in everyday moments. It's helping a co-worker with a challenging project, listening to a friend going through a rough time, or simply smiling at a stranger on the street. These acts of kindness ripple outward, creating a chain reaction of goodness that touches more lives than we can imagine.

By doing our part – whether big or small – we're not just helping others; we're helping ourselves. We're fulfilling the Talmudic truth that giving is a need, not a chore. We're stepping into our role as G-d's middlemen, distributing not only money but love, compassion, and meaning.

Ultimately, every act of giving brings us closer to a world of peace, kindness, and prosperity for all. And that's a vision worth working toward – one small act of generosity at a time.

Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer who supports communities throughout the regional South. You can contact them at y@tasteoftorah.org.