

Breaking Out of 2024

By Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher

As 2024 draws to a close, it's a natural time to reflect. Did you achieve the goals you set for yourself at the beginning of the year? Did you make progress in your career, grow your family, or meet someone special? Or, on the other hand, did the year pass by without reaching the milestones you'd hoped for?

Whether you're celebrating success or feeling the sting of missed opportunities, one thing is certain: the temptation to settle for less. Life's distractions and disappointments can easily lead us into stagnation, where we feel stuck emotionally, spiritually, or intellectually. We might feel like we've reached a peak, or we may feel as though we're caught in a loop, unable to move forward. But whether we're celebrating success or feeling defeated, the real danger is the same: complacency.

Jewish sages refer to the trap of stagnation as being stuck in our "personal Egypt." The word "Mitzrayim," the Hebrew name for Egypt, means "constraint" or "narrow passage." Egypt, in this context, isn't just a place - it represents the limitations that confine us, holding us back from reaching our full potential. Just as the Israelites were trapped in Egypt for centuries, we, too, can become trapped by our own habits, fears, and comfort zones. We might fall into the mindset of "this is good enough," forgetting that life's greatest fulfillment comes from pushing past those boundaries. Like the ancient Israelites, we risk being held back by self-imposed limitations, settling into a life that doesn't allow for true growth.

The journey of the Children of Israel offers a powerful lesson on how to break free from stagnation.

In the Torah, the journey is described in the book of Numbers: "These are the journeys of the children of Israel, going out of the land of Egypt" (Numbers 33:1). The use of the word "journeys" is significant. Why, the sages ask, is it written in the plural? After all, the Israelites departed from Egypt only once. The journey began when they crossed the Red Sea, and it would be complete when they entered the Promised Land. So why refer to it as "journeys?"

The sages explain that this reflects a deeper truth: the process of breaking free from stagnation is not a one-time event, but a continuous journey. Each day offers a new opportunity to shed old habits and embrace a life of growth and fulfillment.

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Echos from Sinai "Torah for Everyone" Rabbi Yonatan Hambourger

New Year's Renewal

"Pete" was an addicted, adulterous, angry man. His was a maudlin story of mistreatment, injustice, and rejection. Poor Pete! What he needed was a New Year's resolution, right? Another addict once told me he wished he could remove his brain, scrub it, and put it back in. No, neither a memory scrub nor a try-harder resolution would fix Pete.

I get it. The New Year is a natural time to re-evaluate life. A quick glance at the past, to remember or regret. An eye to the future, to hope or change. If we could gin up the discipline to keep New Year's resolutions, we probably wouldn't need them. Yet the yearning of the soul is for life to be better, for me to be better. That is why Pete was sitting in my office.

The Bible is a book for the tortured soul. It pulls no punches in describing the human condition. The many deeds of the flesh cause regrets, anxieties, and fitful sleep. "Immorality, impurity, sensuality" start one list of human frailties. It includes "enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger." It hammers the point home with "envying, drunkenness, carousing." You can see Pete in this list. Perhaps you see yourself.

It's a book for the tortured soul because it has the only solution. How would you like for yours to be a life of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"? In contrast with the deeds of the flesh, this is the "fruit of the Spirit." These begin to season the character of those who "belong to Christ Jesus" (Gal. 5). In another place it says, "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive" (Rom. 8:10). Come to Him in repentance of what you were, in faith in who He is, and you'll find hope and life.

Pete received Christ that day. A few weeks later a startled Pete reported his old desires were actually changing. He was making new memories. He needed not a resolution, but a renewal which is only found in Christ.



All Things New Wayne Fowler

From Your Commissioner

Thank you. To the employees that work in the Commissioner's Office, I am grateful for your service and for your determination to get the job done. Your commitment to excellence has not gone unnoticed. Each of you plays a vital role in ensuring that Union County operations run smoothly and efficiently.

Parks and Recreation. You support the kids who participate in sports activities as well as their families. You are available after normal business hours, and you make those long trips out of town on weekends when necessary. I see you. You take care of our beautiful parks and historical facilities. You manure our golf course and remain good stewards of the public rental locations across the County. Your spirit and dedication inspire not only your colleagues but also the entire community we serve, and for that, I extend my deepest appreciation.

Road Department & Transportation. Your unique skills and your hard work on our road and bridge infrastructure exemplify your commitment to ensure a safer, more efficient transportation network for everyone. It's not just about tar, gravel, and asphalt, it's also about mowing, signage, and working with Union County residents on expectations for maintaining our roads. This dedication not only enhances the quality of our public services but also inspires others to contribute to the well-being of our community. I've seen it.

Public Safety. Public safety in Union County is very important to our wellbeing, and your efforts in maintaining and improving this part of our infrastructure play a critical role in ensuring that every citizen feels safe, secure, protected, and connected. The Fire Department, Sheriff's Office, Ambulance, and E-911 are all vital components of this framework, as you work tirelessly to protect lives and property with an unwavering commitment to readiness and responsiveness in times of crisis.

Other Elected Officials. I appreciate the support given by other elected officials. Your dedication to addressing community issues within your specialized areas and advocating for our needs as a society has made a significant impact on our quality of life - ensuring that our community not only thrives today but is also positioned for a bright future.

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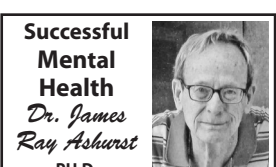
Q & A from Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris

The Family

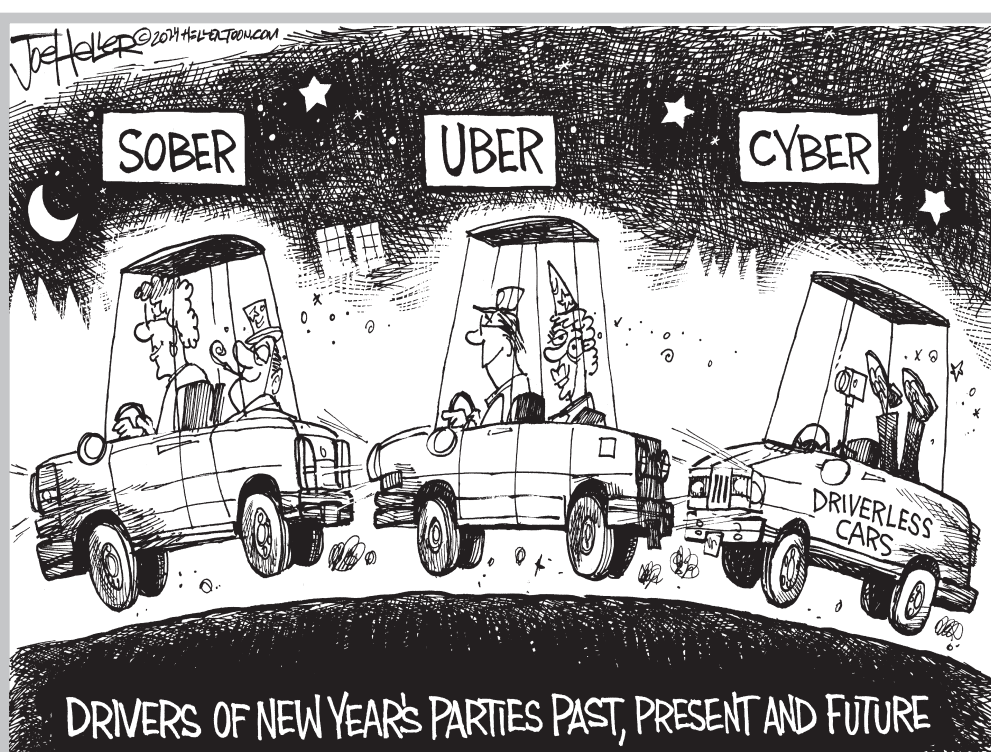
The family is the basic building block in our society. Our family system is where we learn about love, respect, loyalty, life skills, honesty, and the consequences of our decisions. The relationship between parents and children is tightly cemented for life. If the relationship is positive, then the return on one's investment will be healthy results, even though there will be occasional bumps on the journey. On the other hand, if the relationship is negative, then batten down the hatches, because the ride will most assuredly be bumpy. The family is one of the Divine institutions that God implemented, and it is to be treated with respect and dignity. The family is a stronghold in our society, and not to be taken lightly. God holds us responsible for the family unit. The family is to be treasured and treated as such.

The old saying is true: "There is no place like home." How would you evaluate your family unit?

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



Successful Mental Health Dr. James Ray Ashurst PH.D.



Becoming Older

Teach Your Children Well

Dear Editor, Though I titled my letter's theme from a popular song, its message rings true. Now that the holidays have made their appearances, it is noteworthy to consider that all their glitter has meaning but not in the immediate way you may think. We all see the Christmas Tree with its bright lights and ornaments, the Hanukkah Menorah with its eight colored candles and the ninth candle for lighting, and the Kwanzaa candlestick and holder, with its unique design for the seven-day candle lighting.

Each holiday has a different story to tell, but, if each is a present wrapped in a bow, all three messages invite actions rather than receipts. Taken on its face value, you are to be congratulated for doing positive role-modeling for your kids. Gifts are used and can be pulled out every so often, but values are demonstrated daily and move through time with age.

As a teacher, I have been with students ages preschool through college. For my youngest scholars, ages 2 to 5, I used red, yellow and green squares to visually assist them with acceptable behaviors leading to lifelong values. They see red and change their decisions, yellow is a

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The Good Book

Dear Editor, The Bible is the most misunderstood book in history, yet at the same time the most inviting book to read that can change a person's life for the better if they are willing to dive into God's Holy Word and unpack all the goodies that God speaks of to encourage folks of all ethnic backgrounds to not just read the Bible, but to take every word as the gospel truth.

The Bible to me has always been a road map to follow so I don't turn the wrong way. It is filled with over 7,000 promises that will bless your heart and give you hope in a hopeless world. The Bible inspires its readers to dive deep into God's word as if you had not eaten for several days and you hunger at every word you take in that reveals what God has in store for you if you surrender your life over to Him and let Him lead you down the narrow path towards Heaven.

The Bible is the only book that has power in its word to release you from your sin and set you free to live the abundant life that God wants you to live to serve Him with all your mind, heart and soul. It's the only book that starts at the beginning of Genesis and runs through the pages of history of mankind

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Veto and Barbra

Veto should have known better than trusting my father and his cousin Junior. However, he began to like the two Cummings boys and so he continued to hang out with them on Friday evenings. Prior to one Friday the boys were in a literature class and they were discussing the story of Romeo and Juliet. Veto asked Junior if he could introduce him to any girls. Junior told him about Barbra Lauderdale. Junior told Veto that Barbra was a beautiful young lady that lived out around Spruce Pine and he was sure she would like to go out with him.

He explained that Barbra's dad did not like him. However, he thought Lonnie Paul (my Dad) was a very good boy. So, it was decided that Dad would take Veto to Barbra's house to introduce him to Mr. Lauderdale. So, the boys made their plans to meet Friday evening about 7:30 and drive out to the Lauderdale house at Spruce Pine.

Unknown to Veto, Dad and Junior were setting him up for a practical joke. The Lauderdale house was an old abandoned house that was actually lived in by the Lauderdale family prior to this event. Junior was to be present in the house when Dad and Veto arrived. So, Dad met Veto in town at the Pool Hall. Veto showed up wearing enough hair tonic to wet the whole baseball team. Dad said the young man was very nervous because he had never been on a date.

Anyway, Junior was in the house with a coal oil lamp lit and burning when the boys arrived. Dad knocked at the door and Junior answered with a gruff voice, "Who's there?" Dad responded by saying, "Mr. Lauderdale, I am Paul Cummings here with Veto Gore to see Barbra." Junior answered again, "Who? Speak louder. You know I am hard of hearing." Dad yelled this time. "Mr. Lauderdale, Paul Cummings here with Veto Gore to see Barbra." He answered a third time. "Cummings? Junior Cummings, I told you to never come back to my place again." Before either could answer, the Cummings boy stuck a shotgun out the window of the house and fired. Dad grabbed his chest and hit the ground, yelling out, "I'm hit, Veto."

Veto spun and jumped from the porch, his feet hit the ground and he began running. He ran through the front yard and jumped off a 15-foot-tall bluff into a thicket of plants called the Devil's Walking Stick. These shrubs were about 8-feet-tall and covered in 1-inch thorns. Dad said he heard Veto breaking sticks and then heard the wind leave Veto's lungs when he hit the ground. When Dad and Junior quit laughing,

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Around The Farm Mickey Cummings

Apple Tree Pruning

Deep winter is prime apple tree pruning time. Pruning apple trees is important early in the tree's life so that it gets started off right. Later on, if you properly prune the tree each year the tree will be more productive, more disease resistant, and have a longer life. Keeping all these things in mind, let's talk about apple tree pruning today.

The general advice that I give people when it comes to pruning apple trees is to prune as much as you feel comfortable, then go back and prune a bit more. Most of the time people are afraid of damaging the tree if they cut too far back. However, if trees are pruned at the right time of year and the right branches are cut off, it will be better for the long-term health of the tree.

If you have a tree that has not been pruned regularly, and you're trying to get it back into shape you'll want to start out by pruning out dead and diseased branches. Second, you'll want to cut out any crossing branches. Crossing branches create open wounds that can be easily infected. After you've pruned out dead, diseased, and crossing branches you want to try to open up the canopy. An open canopy will allow airflow. That's going to reduce the humidity, and therefore reduce the severity of disease occurring. The saying is that you want the canopy to be so open that a bird could flying through it without hitting any branches. A tree that has too many branches will not be as productive. An apple tree is only able to effectively produce a certain amount of fruit. Adding fertilizer can boost the productivity. Therefore, pruning might affect the number of fruit you tree produces, but you'll have better quality and they'll be more likely to make it all the way to maturity.

Trees that have been properly pruned their whole lives will have more a Christmas tree shape than a teardrop shape. If you have a newly planted tree, you'll need to prune it as well. If you have planted an unbranched whip, you'll need to cut it back to 24 to 30 inches above the ground. This is going to encourage the new tree to branch out. If you don't prune an unbranched whip, you'll probably end up having a 20-foot tall tree that doesn't have any branches on it.

Sometimes people will plant a seed from an apple core that they've eaten. This can be a fun experiment for kids to see an apple tree grow. An issue that you may run into with this is that there is no telling what kind of apple tree will come up. If you plant a seed from your favorite apple, that fruit could have been pollinated by a different variety, leaving you with an unknown cross. Another issue is that nowadays



Watching and Working Jacob Williams

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well-prepared for future justice, growth, and development. There are certainly many dedicated employees that do the work of Union County Government such as general maintenance for buildings and systems, and still others who do County work through third parties such as at the Union County Library and the Senior Center. Your unwavering focus reinforces the importance

of community in shaping a brighter tomorrow. As I look to the future, I carry with me the cherished memories we've created together. I am proud of Union County; I am proud of Union County Employees; and I am proud of what we accomplished together - making Union County one of the best rural counties in Georgia. See you soon. - Lamar

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cess of leaving Egypt is not a one-time event but an ongoing journey. It wasn't just about physically leaving Egypt - it was about shedding the mindset and limitations that Egypt represents. Each of the 42 stops where the Children of Israel encamped in the desert on their way to the promised land was an opportunity for them to evolve, face new challenges, and grow. Every stop wasn't just about moving geographically but about becoming better people, step by step.

Jewish mysticism further elaborates on this idea, saying that "leaving Egypt" is a personal, continuous journey for all of us. Egypt isn't just a physical place - it's a state of mind, a limitation that holds us back. Just as the Israelites had to leave behind the mindset of slavery and move toward freedom, we must continually strive to leave behind the narrow passages of our personal limitations. Whether those limits are fears, bad habits, compulsions, or complacency, the process of growth requires constant movement away from those confines.

This idea is echoed in the teachings of the Talmud, which says, "When we have one hundred, we want two hundred." While this may sound like a lesson in greed, it's really about personal growth. In the material world, wanting more can be negative, but in terms of self-improvement, an endless desire to push forward is a virtue. Once we break free from one limitation, we often find ourselves needing to break through another. What once seemed liberating can start to feel confining as we continue to grow.

The journey of the Isra-

elites was not a quick or easy process. It took decades. Every encampment brought new challenges. Yet, the key was that they didn't stop moving. They didn't remain stagnant. They grew through each hardship. The same is true for us: every time we break through one obstacle, we find new ones waiting to be overcome. The journey never ends, but each step brings us closer to realizing our fullest potential.

For us, the ultimate goal of the journey is to reach the "Promised Land" - a place of self-actualization where we no longer feel held back by the limitations of the past. Our "Promised Land" is a state of being where we fully realize our potential. It's where we live freely and authentically, without the weight of the constraints that once held us back.

As we look back on 2024 and prepare for the new year, it's important to plan the next steps in our own journey. What limitations are you ready to leave behind? What "personal Egypt" are you prepared to break free from? The Exodus is not a one-time event but a process that continues each day. Every day presents a new opportunity to take another step toward freedom, growth, and fulfillment. As we enter 2025, we can leave behind the narrow passages of the past and continue on the journey to the Promised Land of our best selves.

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@tasteoftorah.org.

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passes the power to refuse to spend money authorized and appropriated by congress. In Kendall v. United States ex rel. Stokes, the Supreme Court held: "To contend that the obligation imposed on the President to see the laws faithfully executed, implies a power to forbid their execution, is a novel construction of the constitution, and entirely inadmissible." Assistant Attorney General William Rehnquist (later Chief Justice Rehnquist) wrote in 1969: "It is in our view extremely difficult to formulate a constitutional theory to justify a refusal by the President to comply with a congressional directive to spend."

It is true that presidents in the past exercised what might be considered impoundment authority, but they did so within limited discretionary bounds and not as President Nixon did by abusing his authority and impounding billions in authorized spending simply because he disagreed with the programs Congress enacted. His abuse showed the danger of free-handed impoundment and set the stage for the Impoundment Control Act, as it led to multiple cases brought against his illegal impoundments, one of which, Train v. the City of New York, is often cited as a clear Supreme Court ruling against

presidential impoundment authority.

The truth is the Impoundment Control Act provides authority for a president to cut unnecessary or improper spending authorized by Congress through the processes of rescission and deferral. What the act does is provide for proper oversight by Congress and preserves the separation of powers, which in the words of Justice Brandeis saves "the people from autocracy."

Bottom line: Clyde knows or should know his constitutional argument is faulty and that he would likely lose in court. He should tell us the truth about how the Impoundment Control Act works and not use lies to justify his support for the misguided legislation he is now trying to sell. Instead, we get grandstanding and half-baked arguments from him for a bill designed mainly to let him dodge responsibility for making tough decisions.

What Clyde should do is tell us honestly and frankly where he wants cuts to fall or taxes to be raised and then work (as he is being paid to do) to bring those policies to fruition if he believes they are best for the country. Otherwise, why is he even there?

**Sincerely,
David W. Plunkett**

Kramer... continued from Page 6A

draw but can lead to making themselves and others happy or sad, and green is the get-go to feel success. For me, these were the start of the real gifts I gave to my classes. When I think of my teachers, what I remember most is the way he or she made me feel. Your memories, after all, last a lifetime.

I will leave you now with a colorful bouquet. Carry it with you as much as you can. Red is kindness... show it by sharing. Purple is knowledge... show your smarts in acceptable ways. Yellow is for meeting new people, classmates etc. Green is for growing in appreciation for all things. Orange is for adventure... explore your world, your backyard - a mountain hike can be miraculous.

Finally, blue is for effort; be the best you can be and use your talents with others when you can.

See you around. I look forward to noticing all of your colors shine in the daylight. Enjoy the rest of your holi-

days. From my family to yours, we wish 2025 to be a year of health, happiness and peace.

Lisa Kramer

Williams... continued from Page 6A

most trees have been grafted onto a rootstock. The grafted rootstock will provide more protection from root diseases and may dwarf the tree, which cuts down on the difficulty of managing the tree.

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

Chamber... continued from Page 6A

County strong in the New Year and one of the best communities in the State. Let's work together to make Life Better in Blairsville!

Chamber 101 continues next week.

Cummings...continued from Page 6A

they walked around the bank to the thicket and searched for their friend. All they found were some pieces of clothing and bloodstains. The boys followed the bloodstains back to the road and then down the road toward Phil Campbell. So, they walked back to the car and drove slowly down the road to Phil Campbell.

Dad said they expected any minute to come across Veto, but, never did. Pretty soon the blood trail disappeared and Dad began to worry. However, someone must have picked up

Veto. Because Dad and Junior drove back to the Pool Hall in Phil Campbell and found Veto laying on a pool table. Glenn Cummings was on top of Veto with a big pair of side cutters pulling out 1-inch-long thorns from his backside. The boys had a big laugh at the expense of Veto Gore.

All three of these fellows have passed now. But, they remained friends for years after this incident, and can you believe that both of the Cummings cousins became ministers?

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to the book of Revelation that explains what will take place when Jesus returns for His people to take them home to heaven. The Bible sadly tells of what will happen to all that reject Jesus Christ and how Jesus will judge all unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment Day.

Folks, you don't want to go there, so please digest God's words of truth and decide for yourself if it's right

for you. You will never regret accepting Christ as your Lord and Savior. That is why He came and died in your place, so you don't have to go to Hell. Food for thought.

Frank F. Combs

Your Patriot Reflection



God is the Answer

In the summer of 1787 delegates from the 13 states had gathered to decide how to handle the growing problems resulting from horrendous debt, an economy in shambles, and lawlessness and anarchy on the rise. The Republic's government was inadequate to handle these problems because of the limitations of the Articles of Confederation that they were trying to operate with. It was on the mind of several of the delegates to replace the articles with a constitution, but after five weeks of wrangling, and unwillingness to compromise, they were at a stalemate. It was at this moment that the elder statesman Benjamin Franklin rose from his Windsor chair, and with a captive audience eagerly waiting for wisdom he said, "How has it happened that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understanding? Eleven years ago the Continental Congress had daily prayer in this room for divine protection, and those prayers had been heard and graciously answered. I have lived, sirs, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth--that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it profitable that an empire can rise without his aid? Without the Lord's concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Tower of Babel."

Today, as we see the struggles facing our government, would it not be prudent, wise and profitable to ask Almighty God to reset our path and order our steps to His plans?

A Patriot Reflection is presented weekly by www.joshuawarriors.org.

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