

Opinions

Reclaiming...

Reclaiming America's Moral Compass

America's great experiment stands on two pillars: democracy, where every voice matters, and capitalism, where hard work earns its reward. These systems have helped shape a nation that values both freedom and initiative. But what happens when we sense that something's off – that the music of our public life sounds discordant, or that our most cherished values are drifting from their roots? Sometimes, wisdom from another tradition can cast new light on the challenges we face.

Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah, offers just such a lens. In this tradition, G-d is understood to reveal Himself through a spectrum of qualities – what you might call different modes of His presence in the world. Two of the most essential are lovingkindness – the impulse to give freely and include everyone – and discipline, which is about setting boundaries, demanding accountability, and rewarding effort. One reaches out with open arms, the other draws a firm line and asks, “Are you ready for this responsibility?”

If you look closely, you'll see these qualities reflected in the systems we cherish. Democracy bears the mark of lovingkindness. It insists that every soul deserves a say, that every person counts. It's generous and open, expansive in spirit. Capitalism, on the other hand, reflects discipline. It honors the one who works hard, sets limits, and teaches that rewards come from effort and self-restraint.

But neither quality, on its own, can sustain a healthy society. Too much lovingkindness – democracy without boundaries – can slide into moral confusion, where right and wrong are decided by the crowd, and the loudest voices drown out the rest. Too much discipline – capitalism without compassion – can grow cold, measuring people only by what they produce and leaving the vulnerable behind. History is full of examples of both extremes, and the damage they can do.

So what's missing? What turns this tug-of-war into something beautiful? Jewish wisdom teaches that true greatness comes through balance – a harmony that weaves lovingkindness and discipline together into something greater than either alone. The tradition calls this harmony “beauty,” but it's not about appearances. It's

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Survival Day

At times a depressed person will experience a “survival day” in which the depression is semi-dormant for a short time. These are good opportunities when understanding family members and close friends may offer encouraging and refreshing words and assistance. Just don't

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



get maudlin; a depressed person can see right through such overly sentimental attempts. We are all consumed with numerous necessary tasks during the week, such as cleaning the house, working, cooking, and running errands. It just doesn't seem to end. Triple your normal frustration and that's how it feels to live in the complex world of a depressed person, whether as an adult or a teenager. It can indeed be a hideous lifestyle.

Depression feels as though it lasts forever and a day. What makes depression such a draining illness is that every single day and night is a tremendous challenge. Who is going to win? The

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Letters to the Editor

More Than One Commissioner

Dear Editor,

I live in Owltown district, my friend lives in Dooley district, my other friend lives in Pat Colwell district. We have different issues in our districts that need to be addressed by a person who has authority at the county level to address. A person that I could speak with directly to discuss my issues in this district which are different from the Pat Colwell district, and the Dooley district.

But there is only one person who supposedly covers the whole county. One person for all these issues? The more I see this current type of government in action, and the more I see the current solutions this officeholder has for issues, I realize there really does need to be more than one person handling the affairs of this county.

Eva Lausier

North Georgia Deserves Better

Dear Editor,

Here in the mountains, we pride ourselves on independence, faith, and pulling our own weight. Whether you lean right or left – or you've given up on politics altogether – most of us want the same basic things: decent jobs, affordable healthcare, strong schools, decent affordable housing, and the freedom to live life without interference.

But lately, I've been wondering: Are the people we're voting for actually delivering? Or are they just keeping us angry and distracted while we fall further behind?

Let's look at the facts – not the headlines, not the talking points, just the truth:

Rural hospitals in Georgia are closing

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Fear God, Not Man

Dear Editor,

While most of our society tend to not fear God, the bible is clear that God says mankind perceive God as a benevolent and gentle grandfather who will treat their sin superficially and they will worship half-halfheartedly. They will live life on their own terms rather than God's. The apostle Paul feared God and knew that one day he would stand in judgment and give an account for everything he had done. Our world does not applaud fearfulness. We teach our children to love God, but not to fear Him. We would rather present God as a loving and nonthreatening image of God to nonbelievers in the hope that Christianity will be more appealing to them.

Yes, God is a dear friend who saves us and who lives in our hearts, but we do not fear Him.

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Transformed Community

Martin Shaw is an author and former professor at Stanford University. His specialty is mythology and storytelling. His best story is about his own spiritual journey.

Shaw grew up in a religious home. As a young man, he played in a rock band until tinnitus stopped him. He learned to enjoy long periods of living in the forest. (He still leads wilderness vigils.) At the end of one long camping trip, God got his attention in a rather remarkable way (another story!). Soon after, while still processing those thoughts, someone asked if anything interesting had happened to him recently. “As they said it,” he recounts, “I knew I had fallen into the mind of Christ.” It's an unusual choice of words, but he was expressing his newfound faith.

He received baptism, then began looking for a church. It's what he said about his search that I find most revealing. He said he visited three different churches. About each one he said they were “very, very nice. But I don't want very, very nice! I don't care about very, very nice! I don't need a warm and fuzzy thing. I need to grow and stretch and be deepened.”

You might seek a church for various reasons. You can approach church as a consumer – how can they help you? Or you are an audience member – how well do they entertain? You might be in a negotiation with God – bartering your attendance in return for divine intervention. These are transactional reasons to attend a church. Notice Shaw had a different reason for gathering with fellow believers – to grow deeper in his faith. He wanted something transformational.

I saw a social media post from someone who lived through Hurricane Helene. He recently began attending church again because the volunteer recovery work done by Christians impressed him. He wrote, “The community of church is a beautiful thing. It's just lovely to be around people who also are investing in being better people.” That's only a start. It is even more lovely to be around people who want to be transformed by the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who want as much for you.

The Bible gives us transformational reasons to enjoy Christian community. Together, we share the assurance of faith,

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Liberal Lawlessness in LA

Los Angeles, California is currently consumed by chaos.

Protests erupted on June 6 in response to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents conducting raids throughout the area to arrest illegal aliens. You read that right: Radical liberals took to the streets to oppose federal officers carrying out the basic deportation operations that are needed to reverse the Biden-Harris Administration's invasion of illegals, including violent criminals, into our country.

Delusional is an understatement.

Unsurprisingly, these protests quickly spiraled into riots, featuring foreign flags, violence against law enforcement officers, and destruction of property. Despite Democrats claiming the riots are “overwhelmingly peaceful” and “under control,” images of LA speak for themselves:

Make no mistake, this is the direct result of the radical Left embracing illegal immigration and inciting violence, chaos, and lawlessness.

It's past time liberals accepted the simple fact that residing in the U.S. illegally is a crime. Therefore, every illegal alien is a criminal – and the Trump Administration has the authority to deport every last one from our country.

I applaud President Trump for taking decisive action to quell these un-American riots by deploying National Guardsmen and Marines to the streets of LA. God bless these courageous troops, as well as the local and federal law enforcement officers responding to the violent chaos.

Federalizing the National Guard and mobilizing Marines would be unnecessary if California had strong leadership. Yet Governor Gavin Newsom and LA Mayor Karen Bass are weak and incompetent. Not only are these Democrat officials vehemently opposing President Trump's actions to end the lawlessness, but they're also blaming the Trump Administration for the violence. Notably, their foolish objections aren't just talking points. The State of California is now suing the Trump Administration for deploying National Guardsmen to help end the riots in Los Angeles.

Time and time again, the Left chooses lawlessness and illegals over American citizens. In the face of such insanity, I'm thankful we have a real leader in the White House who unapologetically chooses law, order, and the American people.

United States Congressman
Representative Andrew Clyde



Mamma's Trip to Town

My mother was looking forward to her first trip to town. She was nearly 8 years old and had never been to town, at least she couldn't remember when she had been to town. Anyway, her grandparents, Dad (Charlie) and Mommie (Alvie Baker), were going to Russellville on Saturday.

They had invited their granddaughter and my mother to make the 25-mile trip to Russellville. This was no small task in 1948. The only transportation the family had was a log truck.

That hot July day began early in the morning. Mother said it took nearly an hour to make the trip. Mom said she sat in the middle and watched her grandfather change the gears as they drove down the road. Mom watched Dad as he expertly shifted the gears and applied the brakes to keep them all safe as he encountered the steep hills and curves of Ray Mountain. She said, “I was scared going down that mountain on that old dirt road. But, Mommy Baker's kind and gentle hands reassured me everything would be OK.”

Mother remembers the day as being grand and wonderful. She said, “I can still remember the smell of new clothes in the James Department Store and the smell of new shoes and fresh leather in Watsons. I can still see all those new toys in White's 10 Cent Store. The old Roxy Theater was located just down the street, and I can remember going in there and watching Gary Cooper in an old western movie.” Mom remembered going to the diner and eating lunch.

She also told me there were people from all over the county in town that day. Dad Baker went to get a haircut at the Russellville Barber Shop. While he was there he caught up on all the latest political news of the county. While he was in the Barber Shop, Mommy went to the Beauty Shop where she was able to catch up on the local news as well. Mom said she had the grandest time of her life. She had never seen so many people in one place. She told me there must have been 1,000 people in town that day.

Just before lunch Mom and her grandparents saw the Dubois ladies in the Five and Dime Store. Minnie, the mother, Petunia and Bessie are the same group that shot at my Great Uncle Pick because he brought them some food which they consumed so quick they became extremely sick. Therefore, they thought Uncle Pick had poisoned them.

Aunt Minnie was the smallest of the three rather large ladies. All three ladies were friendly and had the most beautiful clothes. But, sometime they could be quite cantankerous. After lunch they again met Dad, Mommy and mother and sat

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



From Your Commissioner

Let me begin this column with a huge “Thank You” to everyone who made the first couple of Saturday Farmers Market events so successful. The vendors have been plentiful; the customers have been gracious; and everyone so far has been complimentary of the latest enhancements. I saw watermelons going out in the brand new shopping carts, and I saw people using their debit cards in the new ATM machine. What a turnout! On that first Saturday, the Chamber of Commerce helped us celebrate the new Butternut Creek Trail with a ribbon cutting. The new trail features various historic buildings that reflect the daily lives of Southern Appalachia. We are looking forward to an exciting and productive season at the Union County Farmers Market.

Next, I'd like to catch everyone up on what we have been doing at the Road Department. Union County Government maintains 546.83 miles of county roads. Since January 1, 2025, the Road Department has completed 487 work orders. This includes culvert maintenance, scraping and maintaining gravel roads, ditch work, culvert prep, grading, shoulder repair, pothole patching and tree removal. In April, the crew started mowing. There are 3 tractors - one with long arm - clearing on the North and East side of town and 2 tractors - one with long arm - clearing on the South and West side of town.

To date, we have patched Becky Rd., Meadow View Dr., Jonica Gap, and Mull Rd; completed shoulder repair on Low Gap Rd; graded for pipe on Cedar Mtn. Trout Farm Rd.; and scraped more than 90 % of county-maintained gravel roads. The crew has assessed the condition of the gravel roads as they are scraped so we can plan for gravel, pothole repair, etc. Floyds Way, Anns Way and Daniels Way have been capped, and we are currently paving Forest Dr.

The crew in Suches is mowing and scraping roads daily. They make repairs as they are discovered by the crew or when they are reported by our citizens. They use a tractor with long arm to clear as necessary. Spring and Summer are busy times for the Farmers Market and Road Department. Thank you for your patience as we continue to serve the Union County community.

Union County Commissioner

Harold Collins



Chamber 2025

It's hard to believe that July 4th is just around the corner, but we are excited to host this year's July 4th Fireworks Show. We will again be shooting off the fireworks from Meeks Park on Friday the 4th at dusk. There will be free parking available at the park and across the street at North Georgia Technical College. As we have done each year, we will reserve approximately 20 spaces on the NGTC side for Seniors from the nursing home, first responders, volunteers and doctors on call. All other spots are available on a first-come basis. We must also ask that no outside fireworks be discharged during the evening. There are State Laws and Safety Issues that we must comply with that do not allow these fireworks on the property.

There will be food trucks, peanuts, ice cream and lots of goodies to keep the kids entertained while we wait for the show to begin. Several of our local Churches will have activities.

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



New Ag Laws

Every year after the Georgia legislative session is over I like to do a column on the new laws that relate to agriculture that were passed. This year may not have had as many bills that are eye catching, but there are still some important bills below. This column is not meant to be a comprehensive description of the bills passed, or legal advice. If you need either of those things, you should talk with an attorney. My goal here is to raise awareness on the laws that are present in our state in a nonpartisan manner.

Crop protection labelling was passed under Senate Bill 144. The goal of this law is to align Georgia requirements for pesticide labelling with FIFRA (Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act). All pesticides (herbicide, fungicide, insecticide, etc.) must have a label from the EPA. To get that label the pesticide must undergo rigorous testing. This law states that what is written in the label is sufficient warning for the user regarding health risks that could be posed by the pesticide. The goal of this bill is to make sure that crop protection products that producers need stay on the shelves, so that farmers can purchase them.

CUVA refers to Conservation Use Value Assessment. This program allows landowners to put property into a contract that lowers property taxes. CUVA has been around for many years in Georgia. House Bill 129 increased the acreage cap for property that an individual can put into CUVA from 2,000 to 4,000 acres. If you have questions about entering your property into a conservation contract to lower your property taxes, you should contact your county tax assessor's office.

A development that I am personally excited about is funding for the creation of a new hay and forage Extension specialist in north Georgia. This position will mean that County Extension Agents, like myself, will be able to provide more support to cattlemen and forage producers.

House Bill 223 addressed hurricane recovery. This bill does not affect the mountains, because we are not in the disaster area. However, it allows for several temporary tax breaks for farmers that were in disaster areas after Helene. This includes state income tax exemption on federal disaster assistance and sales tax exemption for materials bought to repair livestock buildings, poultry houses, and greenhouses in 2025.

Truck weights have been a contentious issue for the past several years in Georgia. In 2023 House Bill 189 was passed to increase trucking weights from 80,000 lbs. to 88,000

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with them on some benches in front of the courthouse under some shade trees. They talked and talked and enjoyed the afternoon. Mother said, “The ladies looked grand. They had sewn their own dresses which were as pretty as store-bought dresses. Each lady was wearing a beautiful, brightly colored hat with an encircling ribbon which was hand-tatted.

Dad Baker finally grew weary of the day and stood up, which was a signal to Mommy that it was time to go. As he stood Minnie looked up and asked for a ride back toward Ray Mountain. Dad told her that would be fine except all they had was a log truck and the ladies would have to ride in the back. Minnie and her two daughters agreed. They walked to the truck while mother along with her grandparents started to climb in when Minnie asked, “Charlie, I believe I can get into the truck, but, I would be

much obliged if you’d help my two daughters. They have been feeling poorly lately and probably can’t climb up into the bed of that truck.” Dad never cracked a smile and asked “Who is going to help me?”

From her description it took a little bit for her grandfather to help the three ladies onto the bed of that old log truck. Mother said, “I can remember laughing hysterically until Mommy Baker placed her gentle hand on my shoulder.” Mom thought she was in trouble until her smiling Grandfather started the old truck and began driving down the road. Mom said, “Dad Baker looked at Mommy and both of them began to laugh, and they laughed so hard they began to cry.” Those rotund ladies holding their magnificent hats and trying to maintain their dignity and balance while riding up Ray Mountain must have made quite the sight.

Berkman...continued from Page 4A

– including in nearby towns. Since 2010, we’ve lost at least nine, and many more are barely hanging on. That’s not because of liberal overreach – it’s because Georgia leaders, aligned with national politicians, refuse to expand Medicaid. That decision leaves over 400,000 Georgians uninsured, and most of them are working people. It also means hospitals can’t afford to stay open.

We were told that big tax cuts would lift up the middle class and small businesses. But the 2017 tax law gave 82% of its benefits to the richest 1%. If you didn’t own a corporation or have a stock portfolio, chances are you saw little to no lasting benefit – while the national debt ballooned.

Local farms and manufacturers were promised protection. But during the trade war with China, family farms across Georgia got hammered with tariffs. Bailouts followed, but most of that money went to the largest industrial farms, not the small operations that define our rural heritage.

Our children are leaving for lack of opportunities, well-paying jobs and affordable housing.

And now we’re seeing some leaders openly question the legitimacy of elections, talk about pardoning political violence, or suggest using government to punish those who disagree. That’s not conservatism or progressivism – it’s authoritarianism.

I don’t care if someone has an “R” or a “D” by their name. If they’re using fear to hold onto power, they’re not serving us. They’re playing us.

This isn’t about Trump or Biden or which news station you watch. It’s about whether we’re getting results that help our families and neighbors, or just more outrage that keeps us from asking hard questions.

And as we approach another election season, let’s look closely – not just at the top of the ballot, but at every local and state candidate asking for our vote.

Ask yourself:

Do they talk about bringing people together – or just tearing the other side down?

Do they offer solutions for our real problems – or just more slogans and enemies to blame?

Will they fight for rural healthcare, decent wages, affordable housing, and fair infrastructure, or just fight to stay in office?

We don’t have to agree on everything. But can we agree on this: our votes should be earned, not manipulated. Our hospitals shouldn’t close because of politics. And no leader is above the law, no matter how loud or popular they are.

We’ve weathered tough times before – together. Let’s do it again, with our eyes open and our values intact. Let’s demand better, not just from Washington, but from every person who wants the responsibility of representing us.

Michael S. Berkman

Fowler...

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and the eternal promises of God. We “stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” We “hold fast the confession of our hope... encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:22ff).

There’s nothing wrong with coffee, donuts, and nice music at church. But don’t miss the main feature. It’s a transformed community on a journey together, centered on Jesus Christ, helping each other grow in love for God and neighbor until you fly away.

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about justice with mercy, compassion with order – the kind of balance that reflects the highest image of G-d.

Imagine society as a symphony orchestra. If only the violins play, the music lacks depth. If the drums drown out the melody, everything falls apart. But when every instrument finds its place, the result is moving and whole. That’s the harmony our country needs – not just in policy, but in spirit.

Faithful societies strive for this balance. They write laws that protect the vulnerable and honor the diligent. They remember that liberty without responsibility is just as dangerous as order without compassion. When we hold both freedom and discipline in our hearts and in our public life, we reflect the presence of G-d in ways that words alone can’t capture.

But balance isn’t automatic. In Jewish teaching, these qualities are divine, but if they become disconnected from G-d – if we forget the higher purpose that gives them meaning – they lose their holiness and drift toward chaos or cruelty. Democracy, without a moral center, can become a contest of popularity and shifting standards. Capitalism, without a sense of higher calling, can become ruthless and hollow.

That’s why people of faith matter so much to the public square. It’s not just about voting or backing good

Ashurst...

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depression or the person? If the depression wins, the individual will definitely be exhausted at the close of the day with no energy. Depressed people long to rest, sleep, nap, and plainly flop down. It isn’t because they are lazy – far from it. They are simply out of gas for the day; they have absolutely no get-up-and-go to complete the rest of the household chores, which leads to stress, anxiety, frustration, and anger.

Williams...

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lbs. for trucks hauling agricultural and forestry products. The 88,000 lbs. mark is more consistent with what neighboring states allow. The House Bill 189 in 2023 was set to expire on July 1 of 2025. This year, House Bill 164 permanently increased the weight limit for trucks hauling agricultural and forestry products to 88,000 lbs. Some restrictions in the bill are that these trucks cannot drive through metro Atlanta, and there is a 150 mile from point of origin limitation.

Agriculture is the number one industry in Georgia, and so the laws that regulate it are very important. If you have questions related to agriculture you can contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Chamber...

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food and games at the Sorghum Field located in Meeks Park so the kids and the young at heart will be entertained while you wait for the show to begin. The Chamber will have tickets available for your last-minute chance to win this year’s raffle valued at over \$2,000 and growing. These proceeds help fund the show.

We look forward to seeing each of you at the July 4th Fireworks Show! Be sure to go to our website for a calendar of not only Chamber events but also our community calendar for fun events to entertain the kids, family or visitors while here in Blairsville.

Help us as we work to make Life Better in Blairsville.

Combs...

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We must remind ourselves that God is patient with us to a point, but then His wrath steps in because we tend to do what pleases us, rather than what pleases God. God will not be mocked. His Holy word, the bible, must not be put on a shelf just to collect dust. If you find that you have become complacent with God’s commands and have become comfortable in your sin, you are headed for trouble and will be completely isolated forever from a loving heavenly Father.

Fearing God is always the healthy thing so we can be in harmony and peace with a God who loves us deeply and wholeheartedly for eternity. There is a hefty price to pay for eternity when we ignore God’s word.

Frank F. Combs

policies – it’s about reminding ourselves and our neighbors that real liberty and responsibility come from G-d. As Psalm 89 says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; lovingkindness and truth go before You.”

Every generation faces the temptation to let our systems run on autopilot, to forget the spiritual roots that make democracy and capitalism worth having in the first place. But we don’t need to abandon these pillars. We need to redeem them – by returning to the source, by insisting that every human system must answer to the authority of G-d.

May we all be agents of that harmony, and may G-d’s values guide the choices we make on earth.

Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. You can contact him at y@tasteoftorah.org.

Military Time

US Merchant
Marine History
By: Whitey White



Merchant Marine Casualties

There were 243,000 mariners that served in World War II. And 9,521 perished while serving—a higher proportion of those killed than any other branch of the US military. Roughly four percent of those who served were killed, a higher casualty rate than that of any of the American military services during World War II.

There were 733 Merchant Marine ships sunk due to enemy attacks, and the Japanese captured 609 mariners as prisoners of war.

The Germans and Japanese sank six ships manned by

the Merchant Marine in 1941 before Pearl Harbor, making mariners some of the first American casualties of the growing global conflict.

Mariners risked their lives supplying the various branches of the armed forces and joint operations with the tools needed to win the war. But their “behind-the-scenes” logistical work, public misunderstanding over their service status, and rumors of their demands for labor rights contributed to mariners failing to receive their much-earned recognition for their courage through GI Bill benefits.