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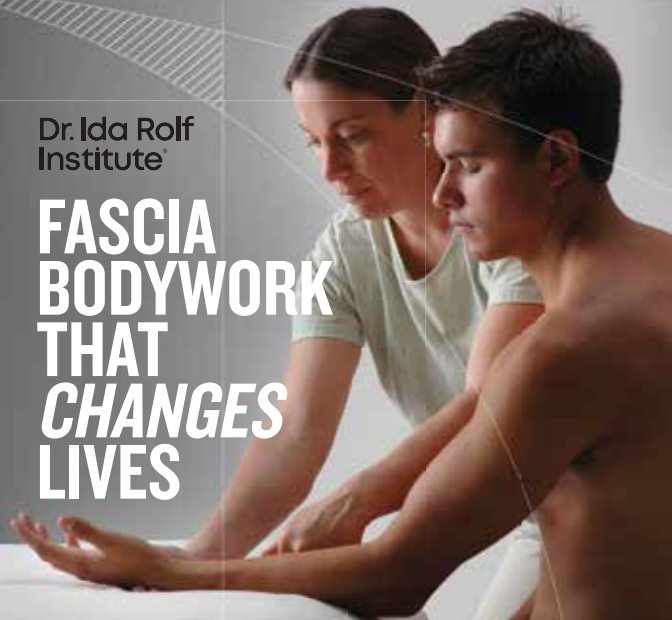
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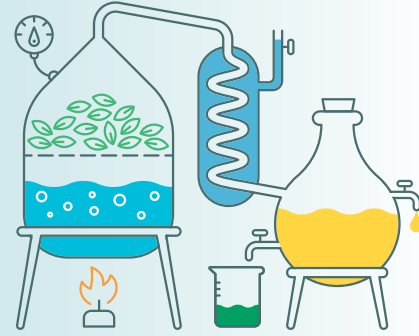


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On the Cover



Our cover subjects are residents of Atlanta's East Lake Commons (ELC) cohousing community. From left to right: Aaron Scott, Eleanor Smith, Finn Leong and Pam "Panda Bear" Willoughby. The photographer is also an ELC resident, Max Eremin. A native of Russia, Max moved to Atlanta in 1996, but didn't pick up his first camera until well into his 30s in 2008. He has since photographed thousands of clients for model/actor portfolios and magazines and is best known for his dark and moody black and white portraits. Max was named one of the "Best of 2014" photographers by the American Society of Media Photographers. www.maxeremine.com

Correction: In last month's news brief on Soha Fitness Studio, the printed address was incorrect. The correct address is 1526 East Forest Ave, Suite 280, in East Point.

Publisher's Letter



Her window was open, but she was not visible. I sensed a faint glumness behind the wan smiles, an energy pervading the group of neighbors gathered beneath the open window. Lora Lee was diagnosed a few weeks before, but her time was short. We gathered to serenade our beloved community member, a woman who will forever be associated with the beauty of our campus as she headed up our community landscaping for years.

This month's lead article is about finding one's *tribe*, which it describes as "those that resonate with our own core values, interests and lifestyle ... The point is to surround ourselves with supportive individuals that uplift us and provide a sense of belonging."

I live with my tribe in a cohousing community. There are only 300 such communities in the United States, and East Lake Commons (ELC), my community, was the 59th to be established. Cohousing.org says, "Cohousing is an intentional, collaborative neighborhood that combines private homes with shared indoor and outdoor spaces designed to support an active and interdependent community life ... In a way, it all comes down to making the world a better place. Connection, environmentalism, security and community support all draw neighbors to cohousing communities."

My then-wife, Pam, and I are founding members of ELC. Indeed, the very first meeting of the group that became ELC was held in our Dunwoody home.

Funny story. When we realized the meeting had been scheduled during the Super Bowl, we asked who had a party to attend. Just one person responded. As a joke, we intentionally scheduled a meeting during the Super Bowl for the next several years.

I tell you this to introduce a big caveat to my overall view that tribal living is wonderful, beautiful and satisfying. One might think that living among one's tribe makes life smooth, easy and enjoyable, but the truth is that ELC has suffered through a similar sort of divisiveness that characterizes much of today's America. While there have been moments of genuine nastiness, at least the level of it doesn't come close to what we see in society at large.

Nevertheless, we are all human, and, at times, some community members do exhibit our species' less-than-wonderful traits of being self-centered and judgmental.

Yet there are many cool heads and warm hearts here, too, and whenever an issue causes division, one individual or another steps up to moderate and modulate. So yes, we experience divisiveness, but, no, we are not at a loss for mitigating factors.

In the end, it's the end that matters most. When someone asks me what the best part of living in a community is, I tell them, "We do death really well." That may sound too narrow and too rare because death's visits are infrequent, but it is exactly in these most difficult of times that the heart and soul of community are revealed in all their glory.

The spontaneous support pouring from residents across the community is unmatched by anything I've seen in society at large. Meal trains are formed. People sign up to help with personal assistance needs. Chauffeur service is guaranteed.

When Jane, the original owner of the house I live in, fell ill and embarked on her final journey, the support was unbelievable. Jane had no family, and community members signed up *as* family; one of our own took the lead in all healthcare arrangements and decisions. That fact alone still startles me.

Our community's death stories are now too numerous to tell, but they might be the very best examples of what it means to live with one's tribe. We all care. We all love. We all do our part. Including a time many years ago when my young son Carter, a talented cellist, played outside the bedroom of our dying neighbor Beth, gracing her ear with some final soulful tones. 🙏



Publisher of Natural Awakenings Atlanta since 2017, Paul Chen's professional background includes strategic planning, marketing management and qualitative research. He practices Mahayana Buddhism and kriya yoga.



Peace of Mind Expo Announces December Event

Mother and daughter duo, Nancy and Sara Hartman, will host their second Peace of Mind Expo at the Gwinnett County Fairgrounds in Lawrenceville on December 14 and 15. Following their first event in June at the same location, the Hartmans aim to bring holistic wellness to Atlanta with more than 80 vendors offering a wide array of products and services, including herbal products, crystals, fresh juices, henna tattoos, acupuncture, reiki, CBD products, aura photos and holistic holiday gifts. The event will also feature free lectures, a 32-foot walkable labyrinth and more.

“We are so excited to bring this event to Gwinnett County Fairgrounds,” says event manager Sara Hartman. “Our vision for producing this Expo is to bring awareness and education in a safe space with loving, positive energy. Our hope is that each visitor takes away a sense of inner peace from not only the modalities and therapies they might receive, the wellness products available and the connections they acquire over the weekend, but also the information they can refer to long after they leave.”

The cost to attend is \$10 per day and parking is free.

For more information, call 404-343-5038 or visit PeaceOfMindExpo.com. The Peace of Mind Expo will take place December 14 and 15 at the Gwinnett County Fairgrounds in Lawrenceville. Disclosure: This magazine sponsored Atlanta’s first Peace of Mind Expo, which took place in June.



Christopher Akpobiyeri, intuitive wellness coach

Coach Sam Releases New Book on Personal Growth



Certified life coach and health coach Sameatria Okam, known as Coach Sam, announced the release of her new book, *It's Not Til Death Do Us Part*, a blend of storytelling and self-help exercises.

The book features a narrative many readers can relate to as she explores several of the life-changing events she has experienced in her life. Designed to be a tool for self-help, it offers coaching activities designed for individual growth and includes more than 45 discussion questions for readers and book clubs.

“My vision and hopes for this book are to encourage people to walk with God in their freedom to make other choices in life if the current ones are truly not serving them,” says Okam. “I want to encourage people to find their true purpose, stand on it and walk in it.”

Okam’s book is now available at major online book retailers. For more information, call 804-837-7080 or visit MBSWomensCoaching.com.

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A Step Toward Change Psychotherapy has moved its practice to 225 Creekstone Ridge, Suite 208, in Woodstock. Camie Vincent, LPC, LMHC, leads the practice, tailoring interventions to each client’s unique needs with techniques such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Psychodynamic Play Therapy and Trauma-Focused CBT.

Vincent’s practice caters to clients of all ages, offering services for individual adults, children, couples and families. The practice focuses on stress reduction and holistic treatments

and emphasizes mindfulness-based interventions. Vincent is particularly skilled in trauma therapy, holding certification as a trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapist, and is listed with the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina. Committed to comprehensive family support, Vincent is also a certified adoption therapist.

“We are excited about our move and believe this new location will help us better serve our clients,” says Vincent. “Our goal is to continue fostering better relationships and stronger families through personalized and effective therapeutic interventions.”

For more information, call 470-685-0003 or visit AStepTowardChange.com. A Step Toward Change Psychotherapy is located at 225 Creekstone Ridge, Ste. 208, in Woodstock.

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Community Spotlight



Photo: Hope Mullett

Dirty South Yoga Fest

10 Years Nurturing Community and Stretching Boundaries

by Diane Eaton, MCIS

A decade ago, Jessica Murphy, a native Atlantan, was practicing yoga all over town but couldn't help but feel that something was missing. In those days, the yoga studios that existed in Atlanta felt wide apart and disconnected to her. There was no "community." The experience felt somewhat isolating, and she grew determined to create something authentic to bring Atlanta yoga practitioners together in a meaningful way.

"Jessica just saw a great need for the yoga studios and yoga students who were fairly spread out at the time to be able to come together," says Catherine Koonce, who stepped in as director of operations in 2023, when Murphy wanted to start a family and felt it was time to delegate—after 10 years of managing almost everything herself—some of the managerial tasks to someone she could trust.

"I was getting exposed to so many new teachers," Murphy said in an earlier interview, "and I was having such a great experience, it seemed to me that everyone should have the chance to try out all the great teachers in Atlanta." Her commitment was to create

something that was approachable, authentic, inclusive and supportive to nurture a sense of community and connection among anyone interested in yoga.

And Dirty South Yoga Fest—a weekend festival designed to do just that—was born. Historically a two-day event, but now three days, the event features more than 100 Georgia-based yoga instructors and a panoply of vendors, food trucks, wellness brands, spa treatments, energy work and more for people to experience. This year, the festival will once again be held at the Loudermill Center in Atlanta on August 23 through 25.

Participants can immerse themselves in a rich array of experiences—from gentle and restorative yoga classes to challenging and "sweaty" ones—and choose among an expansive set of unique offerings, including Sonic Yoga, Inversions, Your Inner Compass, Moving with Grief, Afro Fusion Flow Yoga, Radical Rest Kundalini and Southern Hip Hop Strength.

Stretching with Growth

With the fest's history of selling out and drawing new attendees, the 2024 event is expected to be extra special. In 2023, its first year back after taking a three-year break due to the pandemic, 85 percent of ticket holders were new to the festival, and organizers are expecting upward of 1,200 attendees at the 2024 festival, up from around 1,000 in 2023.

Attendees are coming from farther away, too. While people have typically hailed from Atlanta and cities all around the South, last year the yoga festival witnessed more people arriving from cities as far away as New York City, Miami, Los Angeles and other Western states to experience connection and explore several of the many flavors of yoga.

More teachers from outside of the Atlanta area are joining in the fun, too. As COVID shut down a lot of studios for a couple years, Murphy and Koonce noticed that several teachers and studios from around the state were still innovating and growing in spite of it. Many of them provided "really incredible offerings," says Koonce. Several of them have now been included in the Dirty South Yoga Fest schedule.



Jessica Murphy



Catherine Koonce

In fact, teacher interest in Dirty South has stretched even beyond Georgia's borders, as organizers have been receiving a record number of teacher applications from out-of-state applicants. Since it began, the festival has only engaged teachers from Georgia since it wanted to support the local scene first and foremost. But that limitation might soon be lifted. "In 2025, when we start our second decade of the festival, we will be looking to expand [teacher hometowns] to a few additional states," says Koonce.

The festival's messaging about community may also be feeding its growth. "It's not just for the yoga teacher. It's not just for the studio owners," says LeNaya Crawford, E-RYT 500, co-founder and co-CEO of Seviin Yoga in Kirkland Commons. "It's for the people that are in the community and wanting a tangible way to sample and access the different ways in which yoga is taught and experienced in Atlanta."

Pushing Beyond Boundaries

The yoga festival is also enjoying its second year partnering with lululemon to produce the event. Koonce finds the global apparel company to be both inspiring and inclusive. "To be able to add a really loving, perfect partnership with lululemon has meant the world to us," she says. "lululemon itself has built a fantastic wellness community and a feeling that any type of wellness is for everybody." Over the last year, the company has helped the festival grow and reach a wider audience.

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Photo: Michelle Hettman

Pushing back on the tendency for Americans to harbor a limited—even stereotypical—idea of what yoga is and who it’s for, diversity is a key ingredient to the festival’s mission. “The most important piece is diversity. No one looks the same. No one practices the same. Everyone is coming from different backgrounds. We’re all coming together for the sole purpose of celebrating the ability to move and breathe in this life,” says Crawford. “It’s been really nice to see all the ways in which people have expanded their ideas of what it means to be in a yoga community.”

“Yoga is for every body,” says Koonce, who has been involved with event production for 15 years. “We really want to honor all types of yogis—people who are new, people who have been yogis for years, people who left and came back.”

Embracing Self-Care

As the culture is embracing and adopting more self-care practices these days, yoga studios are responding. “People are applying this idea of true self-care—not just about what’s outside your body but also what you’re putting into it,” says Koonce. There’s more attention to functional wellness, nervous system regulation, and trauma-informed yoga practices in Atlanta studios, for example.

This more holistic perspective and attention to inner wellness has even inspired Murphy and Koonce to begin to roll out new branding for the company. The red, black and white logo of the past nine years has expressed the raw and self-expressive energy that was an important part of its identity. But organizers feel it’s time for a change and are introducing a new, more calming brand look this year, featuring purples, blues and peach colors to reflect a softer and more self-aware energy. The new identity already has some presence on the company website.

Community First

“One of the things that makes the festival special is that, from the beginning, it wasn’t about who could be the best teacher or do the backbend or do the cool thing. It was always about how do we come together as a community and showcase our diversity in wellness and in yoga,” says Crawford. The Dirty South Yoga Fest has helped open countless minds about what yoga is, and it has helped foster connection and community so that no one has to feel alone in their yoga journey. Plus, it makes it all that much more fun. 🧘

Tickets for the Dirty South Yoga Fest are on sale online from \$35 for the Friday night kickoff party to \$289 for the Friday night event and full access to activities for all three days. The event takes place August 22 through 25 at the Loudermilk Center, 40 Courtland St. NE, in Atlanta.

Disclosure: Natural Awakenings has been a media sponsor for the last several festivals.



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In Search of the Healthiest Diet

Sustenance and Habits Inspired by Blue Zones

by Maya Whitman



Aarnulya from Getty Images/CanvaPro

The average life expectancy is 77.5 years in the United States, but residents of the Seventh-Day Adventist city, Loma Linda, California, are outliving the rest of the country by 10 years. Like other regions of the world classified as Blue Zones, Loma Linda's soil and water aren't sprinkled with magic, but daily lifestyle and dietary habits might be key contributing factors.

Coined by *National Geographic* explorer and researcher Dan Buettner, the term "Blue Zones" is bestowed upon intriguing corners of the world where people reach their ninth decade and beyond without suffering from chronic illness and disease. While no definitive formula for longevity exists in Loma Linda or any of the other four Blue Zones—Nuoro Province, Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica; Okinawa, Japan; and Ikaria, Greece—commonalities include staying physically active, eating unprocessed food and enjoying a vibrant social network.

"By prioritizing physical activity, encouraging plant-based diets and creating spaces that promote social interactions, communities can reduce the incidence of chronic diseases and improve overall well-being," says Buettner, author of *The Blue Zones Kitchen*, who found his life's work traveling the world in search of centenarian secrets.

Delicious Simplicity

In 2023, *JAMA Internal Medicine* published the findings of a long-term study involving more than 75,000 women and 44,000 men over 36 years, which determined that adherence to one of four plant-based and Mediterranean dietary patterns can lower the risk of premature death. All of the dietary guidelines in this study included whole grains, fruits,

vegetables, nuts and legumes. Growing evidence suggests that nutrient-dense, unprocessed meals play a major role in reducing inflammation and oxidative stress, which can contribute to cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes.

"Diets in Blue Zones are predominantly plant-based, with a heavy emphasis on vegetables, fruits, legumes and whole grains. They also eat a variety of beans, which are a staple in their diets and an excellent source of protein and fiber," Buettner points out, adding that moderate portion sizes, unhurried mealtime and leaving the table when 80 percent full are also highlights of the Blue Zone lifestyle.

Anna Freedman, a natural-food chef, educator and founder of Wholefood Harmony, in London, England, specializes in a health-supporting macrobiotic approach based on ancient Japanese philosophy and developed in the 1920s by George Ohsawa. She says, "Whole foods are essential to health and longevity. Plants capture the sun's energy, so consuming vegetables, fruits, legumes and grains bestows both nutrition and vibrancy upon the body. These foods are alkalizing and directly nourish the cells, restoring the blood quality and supporting health and longevity."

Macrobiotic favorites like lentils, chickpeas, whole grains and dark, leafy greens echo Blue Zone dietary models and are believed to promote overall systemic balance. The macrobiotic approach, adds Freedman, "can be adjusted to focus on improving a certain health condition or

adapted to meet climate, phase of life or another factor." In her work with clients, she encourages the consumption of a wide range of plant ingredients and cooking styles, and even incorporates certain animal proteins, to accommodate client preferences.

Diets that seek to promote a longer, healthier life usually include powerhouse ingredients such as naturally fermented sauerkraut and kimchi, legumes like lentils and split peas, and whole grains, especially barley, millet and oats.

Social Sustenance

In our modern world, feelings of isolation are reaching epidemic proportions, and in the medical community, loneliness is now seen as a risk factor for mortality that is equal to the effects of obesity, smoking or a sedentary lifestyle. Through Blue Zone research, it is understood that emotional nourishment is vital to good health. According to Buettner, "In Blue Zones, people often engage in regular social interactions, whether it's through communal meals, faith-based gatherings or simply spending time with neighbors and family." A table of delicious food surrounded by loved ones is an inspiring way to eat and age gracefully.

For Gladys McGarey, M.D., cofounder of the American Holistic Medical Association, who is still practicing medicine at 103 years of age, our thoughts are also a form of nourishment. "What we feed our minds grows and lives, and we become it," says the author of the bestseller *The Well-Lived Life*. "It has to do with love, the whole process of life. Love must be shared to flow, and life is the same. We must not only create community, but live it."

Freedman sums it up saying, "Eating and togetherness is a key feature of humanity, which is alarmingly in sharp decline. Food was always meant to be enjoyed together, and doing so serves up much more than simply nutrition." 🍌

Maya Whitman is a frequent writer for *Natural Awakenings* magazine.

Immune-Boosting Soup With Miso and Ginger Scent

This macrobiotic soup combines all the healing and digestive benefits of miso and ginger. Noodles, fish and a variation of vegetables can be added, too.

YIELD: 4 SERVINGS

- Dash sesame oil*
- 1 leek, finely sliced*
- 1 carrot, finely diced*
- 1 zucchini or summer squash, finely diced*
- 3-inch portion of wakame sea vegetable, rinsed and cut into small strips*

- 3 cups boiling water*
- Spring onions, finely cut for garnish*
- 4 tsp brown rice miso paste*
- 1 inch ginger root, juiced*

Heat the sesame oil and sauté the leek for one minute. Add the other vegetables and wakame. To make a broth, add water to cover the ingredients, bring to a boil then simmer for 4 minutes.

Remove one ladle of broth and place in a bowl. Add the miso to this broth, stirring to dissolve and incorporate the paste into the broth, and then pour it back into the original pot of cooked vegetables. Add ginger juice and simmer for another minute or so. Garnish with spring onion.

Recipe courtesy of Anna Freedman.



aprilante from Getty Images/CanvaPro

Bean and Squash Tortillas With Papaya Salsa



Nolimediano99 from Getty Images/CanvaPro

Toasted Spiced Chickpeas (Sardinia Side Dish)



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The Power of Community

Finding a Path to Meaningful Connection

by Thais Harris, BCHN



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Despite society’s increasing emphasis on individualism, the concept of community remains a powerful force for personal and collective well-being. Loneliness is detrimental to both mental and physical health and comparable to smoking or obesity in terms of risk factors. Among older adults, isolation is associated with an increased probability of dementia.

In his book *Project Unlonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection*, Dr. Jeremy Noble discusses the public health and economic impacts of widespread seclusion, as well as the importance of building meaningful connections. He advocates making loneliness screening a routine part of health care and prescribing social activities such as museum visits, classes and nature walks for patients. These measures have been effectively used in the United Kingdom.

There is a growing movement that encourages us to find our tribe—those that resonate with our own core values, interests and lifestyle. While historically associated with Indigenous groups, a “tribe” is defined as a social division consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect. The point is to surround ourselves with supportive individuals that uplift us and provide a sense of belonging.

Multigenerational Communion

Family is, in a sense, our original tribe, serving a crucial role in our sense of belonging throughout life. Regardless of interpersonal dynamics, maintaining consistent connection with relatives can ease loneliness and improve longevity and other health outcomes. In the world’s Blue Zones, where people live the longest and have a better overall quality of life, the happiest centenarians build their lives around their families, and multigenerational households are common.

To remain anchored in our heritage, it is essential to regularly share moments and activities with kin, enjoying family meals, holiday parties, game nights, walks around the neighborhood or even living room hangouts. Simply spending time together allows us to share family stories, learn from each other and create traditions. Outside the family, there are many ways to find or create a tribe of cheerful acquaintances and deeply held friendships that form a safety net to shield us from drifting into isolation.

Serving Others

Volunteering is a powerful way to engage in activities that align with our passions and values while also connecting with like-minded people and helping a cause or deserving group of individuals. One example is Volunteers in Medicine (VIM), founded in 2003, which brings together 70 medical professionals and approximately 100 community stakeholders that volunteer their time to provide free health care for the uninsured people of the Berkshires, in Massachusetts. While the practitioners treat patients—in-person and online—the others serve as interpreters, drivers and receptionists. The generosity of these individuals addresses an important need in the community and keeps people out of hospitals.

“By engaging in VIM’s mission, volunteers find purpose and meaning through the act of giving back, enhancing their own lives while improving others,” shares VIM Executive Director Ilana Steinhauer. “The opportunity to serve the community not only fulfills a personal desire to help those in need, but also fosters a deep sense of connection and community among volunteers. This camaraderie and shared mission enrich the volunteers’ lives, creating a ripple effect of positivity that strengthens the entire community fabric, making it a cornerstone of community and personal development.”

Another example is nonprofit Citizen University, which equips Americans to be cultural catalysts. Their Local Civic Collaboratory aims to shift the paradigm of success from individual achievement to shared triumph. Through collaborative gatherings, participants are empowered to address local issues, launch educational initiatives and spark artistic endeavors while

relishing in deep conversations, forging meaningful bonds and launching networks of unified action.

Making Deep Connections

Coming together around shared beliefs or devotional practices can be another avenue to step away from seclusion and into a loving fraternity. Some people with shared values and goals choose to live with each other in what is known as intentional communities, many of which emphasize sustainability, cooperation and mutual support. The Foundation for Intentional Community offers an online directory to find the right living situation based on multiple criteria, including geographical location, community type, dietary preferences, educational styles, religious or spiritual beliefs and renewable energy sources.



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The Kindness of Strangers

When we are out and about, we encounter people we don't know—strangers in super-market aisles, bank lines or walking their dogs in the local park. Instead of passing by without acknowledging them, we have the choice to say hello or exchange pleasantries. On his podcast "Hidden Brain," Shankar Vedantam explores how these tiny encounters can impact our lives. Smiling at people in the street, expressing gratitude for small acts of kindness or complimenting someone's style elevates both parties. Studies by Amit Kumar, assistant professor of marketing and psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, and Nicholas Epley, professor of behavioral science at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, highlight the beneficial, long-term impact of small acts of kindness and positive interactions on recipients and givers.

Bonding Online and In Person

If friendships were lost during the pandemic, rebuilding a tribe will require intentionality and creativity. Reaching out with purpose to create community might just be what saves us and the planet. When we feel a sense of belonging, we can collaborate for the common good and boost our ability to protect nature, innovate and find solutions for the world's problems. How we network is limited only by our imagination: Take classes at the local library, community college or arts organization; find a fun activity on *MeetUp.com*; or form a group to make new friends that share a common interest.

While online tribes can offer accessibility and a broader reach, thus facilitating connections with people from different geographies and backgrounds, face-to-face interactions are essential to our well-being. Holistic psychologist Victoria Kar shares, "Never in history has humanity been more disconnected from each other than now. The predominance of urban lifestyles creates barriers for deep social connections, and technology creates a false sense of belonging—where we can reach someone on the other side of the world on a screen—yet have no one to hold next to us."

In-person communities provide a more heartfelt sense of fellowship. When we are present, we emit energetic fields, and the heart radiates perhaps the most powerful energy. Studies conducted by the HeartMath Institute have shown that the heart's magnetic field can be detected by other individuals up to five feet away, igniting our sense of belonging in a way that is not possible online.

In his recent advisory report, "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Hallegere Murthy notes that, across age groups, people are spending less time with each other in person than two decades ago, and this is most pronounced among young people aged 15 to 24 that are engaging in 70 percent fewer interactions with friends. Murthy points out, "The impact of this lack of social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces and organizations, where performance, productivity and engagement are diminished."

The report outlines six recommendations to enhance social connection, including:

- Urging for greater social infrastructure at parks, libraries and public programs
- Enacting pro-connection public policies at every level of government such as access to public transport and paid family leave
- Mobilizing the health sector to address needs stemming from isolation
- Reforming digital environments
- Investing in research to deepen our understanding of social isolation
- Cultivating a culture of connection

In his book *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World*, Murthy identifies three types of connections that play a crucial role in our lives: intimate (close friends and family), relational (friends and acquaintances) and collective (communities). Factors such

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as work culture, social media and urbanization can hinder meaningful connections, contributing to a growing sense of isolation.

As a solution, he emphasizes the importance of small, consistent actions such as active listening, expressing gratitude and engaging with community. True connection is a source of healing. The Surgeon General urges, “Answer that phone call from a friend. Make time to share a meal. Listen without the distraction of your phone. Perform an act of service. Express yourself authentically.”

Finding a tribe can significantly impact our health and happiness, providing support, joy and inclusion. The connections we choose to nurture can enrich our lives in profound ways, ensuring we thrive in body, mind and spirit. 🌱

Thais Harris is a board-certified holistic nutritionist, bestselling author and international speaker. Connect at NourishTogether.com.

Healthy Kids 

Overcoming Generation Z Loneliness

Prioritizing Human Interactions Over Screen Time

by *Thais Harris, BCHN*



View Apart/CanvaPro

Generation Z, defined as those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has grown up in a digital era characterized by constant connectivity, yet accompanied by profound isolation. The pervasive use of social media, economic uncertainty, hybrid work environments, climate change anxiety and societal pressures contribute to this sense of loneliness.

The Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index found that nearly eight in 10 Gen Zers (79 percent) are lonely. Schools reported that between 2012 and 2018 nearly double the number of high school students worldwide expressed a sense of loneliness compared to the previous decade. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, loneliness is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety and premature death. Those that experience social isolation have a 32 percent higher risk of early death.

A leading theory for this phenomenon is that 2012 was the first year when more than 50 percent of Americans had access to a smartphone, and the use of social media platforms reached critical mass. While these platforms offer connection, they often lack the depth and authenticity required for meaningful relationships. They give us the illusion of being

connected while having our heads down, focused on our devices and ignoring the people and experiences around us. The curated nature of online profiles also can foster feelings of inadequacy and increasing loneliness.

To address this epidemic, it is essential to focus on creating environments that encourage genuine interactions and a sense of belonging. Understanding our needs and triggers, while also nourishing a sense of connection from within, can open the possibility to greater social connection and deeper interactions in the world. Here are some strategies:

Engage in community. Active participation in local activities can significantly reduce feelings of isolation. Volunteering, joining clubs or participating in neighborhood events foster a sense of purpose and connection. Engaging in community service can enhance social networks and provide emotional support while helping others.

Share interests and hobbies. Finding and participating in groups centered around shared interests can lead to deeper connections. Whether it's a book club, sports team or foreign language class, these gatherings offer opportunities for meaningful interactions and friendships. Researchers from The University of Queensland, in Australia, found that engaging in activities that align with personal interests helps to form a coherent social identity and reduces feelings of isolation.

Talk to strangers. Contrary to what older generations taught their children, talking to strangers is not necessarily a dangerous endeavor. It might seem easier to interact with our devices than start a conversation with someone new, but the results of the latter provide a greater sense of well-being and a feeling of belonging. Happier people spend more time talking to others, and when people have more conversations with others, they report being happier.

Be authentic, kind and open. Building genuine relationships requires authenticity. Being open and honest about our feelings and experiences fosters trust and deeper connection. When unsure about what to say, a random act of kindness can profoundly impact the day for the better, creating a ripple effect in the community.

Start from within. “Our epidemic of loneliness corresponds to an epidemic of self-neglect. This isn't just about being out of touch with others, but with our own body's needs. Screen time can invade the space for adequate sleep and movement, leading to less resilience and reduced immunity,” says Peter Sholley, a psychotherapist in Massachusetts. “The gut biome is directly implicated, affected by low-nutrition foods, antibiotics, and sleep and exercise deficiencies. Many studies point to a connection between a compromised gut biome and lack of microbial diversity with an increase in depression and anxiety.”

The Power of Community

A strong, in-person community provides a support system, reduces stress and promotes overall well-being. To combat the loneliness epidemic among Generation Z, we can start by extending a kind greeting to everyone we meet—on a bus, in the classroom or in the checkout line. 🌱

Thais Harris is a holistic nutritionist and author. Learn more at NourishTogether.com.

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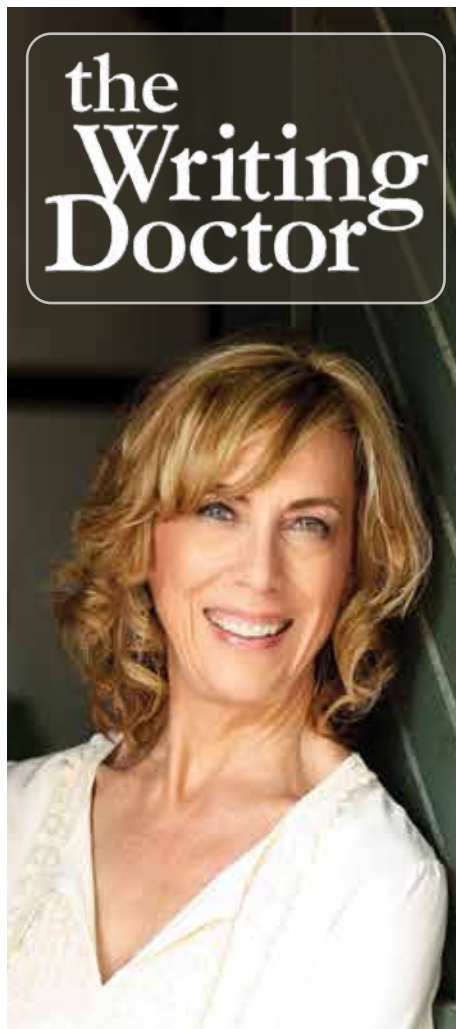
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Yoga —————  —————

Rest is Always Available

Restorative Yoga in Metro Atlanta

by Patricia Schmidt, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, YACEP



racorn / depositphotos.com

This month's article on restorative yoga continues *Natural Awakening's* review of popular yoga styles in the Atlanta metro area. Restorative yoga classes are available at almost every major studio in Atlanta. They're often scheduled late in the day, reflecting the slower pace of the class and the intention for a restful experience. In fact, restorative yoga is a unique yoga style with a unique purpose: it invites deep rest and nourishment as an integral part of the postural experience. It fosters a felt sense of rest and ease as a ground from which to live and to which we may always return. In other words, it helps us become aware that rest and ease are always available.

Restorative Yoga Essentials

A slow pace and limited postures

A slow pace and limited postures facilitate a sense of ease. Restorative yoga usually refers to a very slow-paced postural practice. Over the course of an hour's class, for example, students will take five to eight yoga postures and hold them for longer periods of time. Three to five minutes is the typical amount of time spent in a posture, while a longer period of time might also be considered for certain fundamental opening or closing postures, such as corpse pose, or *savasana*, in Sanskrit.

The fewer postures and longer holds differentiate restorative yoga from other more active yoga practices, and the focus or intention of the class is ease. Restorative yoga becomes an invitation to the body and mind to take deep rest and nourishment, to pause and stop. The style encourages students to step away from the intensity of other yoga and workout practices and, more importantly, step away from the hustle of daily life. Some teachers even include gentle movement, such as a very slow movement of the spine in multiple directions, as a kind of "rinsing" of the longer-held postures. Still, the longer holds, facilitated by lots of props, and the limited movement during and between poses will dominate the class.

An environment conducive to rest

In contrast to high-intensity practices such as gym workouts that often take place in frenetic, noisy environments and encourage students to constantly move energy, restorative yoga uses a limited number of longer-held postures to limit the sensations experienced by the body. Teachers of restorative yoga also often make further environmental adjustments to reduce physical stimulation, such as darkening the room and limiting external noise. Students can usually expect to find dimmed lights, a light scent such as lavender oil, low-volume music with a

small dynamic range and a quiet studio environment.

Yoga props that encourage a sense of ease, support and "not doing"

Restorative yoga classes are known for including a variety of props. Blankets are used to support the head, arms, legs and more. Students are encouraged to prop their bodies away from a cold floor or to pad against the hardness of the floor. Blankets can be used on top of the body to feel covered and protected and, if desired, weighted. Yoga pillows, or "bolsters," are sometimes used to prop the body, too. They can be used to limit the sensation of stretching, achieve more ease within a pose, and increase the feeling of being supported. Eye pillows are often used not just to darken one's vision but also as a gentle weight on the surface of the palms or forehead.

Props play an important role in restorative yoga by encouraging the student to ask themselves, "How little can I do? How much can I surrender?" The practitioner aims to let the pose do the work and accept the process of surrender. This is in stark contrast to yin yoga practices of "finding an edge" and sitting with sensation. Yin yoga's emphasis on target areas and connective tissue experiences is absent from restorative yoga practices, for example. The

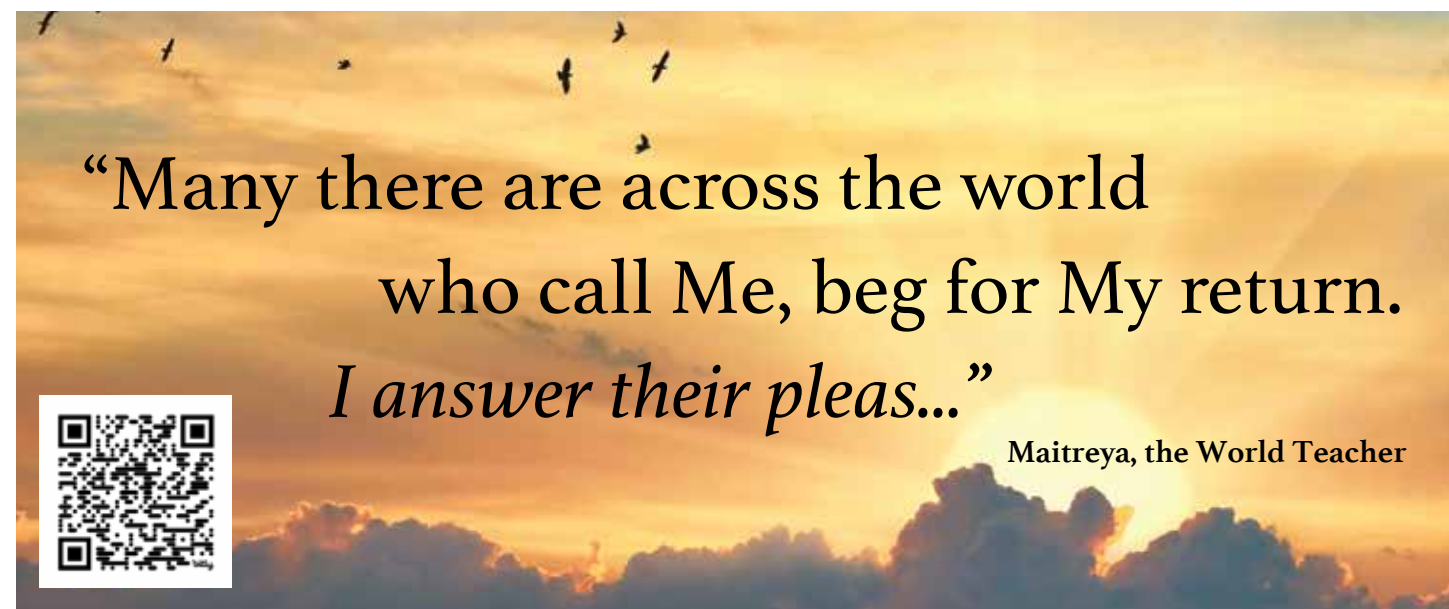
restorative yoga postures are also more welcome than those practiced in a strict yoga nidra class, where postural yoga isn't part of the experience. Of course, yoga nidra and restorative yoga have intention-setting and body scan techniques in common, but the focus on letting go and feeling held and supported during the postural part of the practice is unique to restorative yoga.

Why Rest?

To live with greater ease

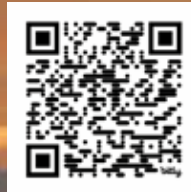
Perhaps even more significant than understanding how to rest with restorative yoga is why rest is so significant. Dominique Harmon, LCSW, E-RYT 200, R-HYI, is an Atlanta-based mental health care practitioner and experienced yoga instructor who uses restorative practices to serve her students, especially women of color. Harmon is the founder of *A Life Lived on Purpose*, a wellness company that integrates psychotherapy and health coaching along with yoga and meditation practices. She stresses that restorative yoga practices welcome an alternate way of being in the world, calling it a lifestyle choice—one that welcomes a consistent state of greater ease.

"We don't have to be dis-regulated in order to engage in restorative yoga," Harmon explains. "Think about keeping your tank filled, keeping your cup full. We have these practices that we just know—that help us



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SATURDAY, AUGUST 17

Sensual Awakening: Orange Chakra Women's 2-Day Retreat – 9am-9pm, Saturday and Sunday. An empowering retreat centered around the second chakra. Second of seven chakra retreats for women. Includes exploration, meditation, yoga, interactive workshops, connecting to nature, creative expression, circle time. www.aumstudioforwellness.com/events/

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MONDAY, AUGUST 19

Feldenkrais: Getting to Know Yourself – Mondays, Aug 18-Nov 3. 1:30-3pm. Get to know your musculo-skeletal system and movement patterns in a deeply embodied way, opening the door to self-awareness and lasting change. \$500/10 lessons. Vista Yoga, 2836 Lavista Rd, Ste D, Decatur. 404-929-9642. VistaYoga.com.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 23

Dirty South Yoga Fest – Aug 23-25. 10:30am-4:30pm, Workshops; 6:30-10:30pm, Fri; 8am-5pm, Sat & Sun. Featuring 100+ local yoga instructors, vendors, food trucks, wellness brands, spa treatments, energetic work, conscious shopping. The Loudermilk Center, 40 Courtland St NE, Atlanta. Details: DirtySouthYogaFest.com.

FRIDAYS

Community Vinyasa Flow – 6pm. Pre-registration required. Donations welcome. Lift Dunwoody, 1705 Mt Vernon Rd, Ste E, Dunwoody. Also at Lift Alpharetta, 501 S Main St, Ste 101, Alpharetta. LiftYogaStudio.com.

SATURDAYS

Online Sunrise Yoga Meditation – 7-8am. Simple mantras, gentle asanas, pranayama and guided meditation. Love offering. Zoom. UnityNorth.org.

Yoga at Preston Ridge Community Center – 9am. Grab your mat and join our amazing instructors for a complimentary class. 3655 Preston Ridge Rd, Ste 100, Alpharetta. LiftYogaStudio.com.

To place an ad in our Yoga section, inquire at ads@naAtlanta.com.

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to be at our best. We do them because we know that they help us to be at our best.”

To connect with ourselves

Based in Peachtree City, yoga teacher Jill Elkin, E-RYT 200, RYT 500, YACEP, is certified in a restorative practice called iRest as well as other restorative yoga techniques. She regularly leads Restore and Renew teacher trainings with Judith Lasater, and assists iRest retreats and trainings too. She stresses that restorative yoga offers a way to forge neural pathways that lead us to our true self, which is untouched by our daily experiences and to which we can always return. Restorative practices offer us an opportunity on the mat to practice being witness to ourselves. Elkin explains that when life presents challenges, “we get stuck in that nervous system spiral. Instead, [with restorative practices,] we have a lot of time feeling into what’s true for ourselves—our own sense of inner resource. That it’s always there, even in the background, when it doesn’t feel evident. [With restorative yoga,] we *feel what we’re feeling* right at that moment. And we ask [ourselves]: ‘Is there a place within myself where I feel whole and complete?’”

To heal

Harmon believes that these practices are especially valuable for helping African Americans heal from the structural and systemic racism and trauma they experience. She offers virtual and in-person retreats for women of color, emphasizing restorative yoga practices as one of many tools Black women can use to increase their well-being and shift their perspective and life approach. Restorative yoga, she explains, makes an “explicit invitation” to comfort, which translates to practices off the mat. “I really like the analogy of being *held* with restorative yoga because, oftentimes, we approach life being very independent. [We think,] ‘I’ve gotta do this by myself, and I can’t take the easy way out. I’ve gotta do it the hard way.’ “I don’t think that’s true,” she continues. “I think that we can always look for ease—how to invite and bring more ease into everything we do in life. Restorative yoga

really asks us to do that—how can you be in this posture with as much ease as possible? And give yourself permission to be held by the bolster, the blocks. If you’re cold, put on socks. Use a blanket. Do you need a second blanket? You don’t have to tough it out! It’s asking us to bring ease and comfort to this opportunity of being in this posture. I really like that, and it translates so well into life.”

Elkin also uses restorative yoga to serve those living with complex PTSD and chronic pain as well as veterans and speaks to the shift of mindset that these practices facilitate. Restorative yoga “changes your perspective,” she says. “It makes a small shift. It’s not a cure ... but restorative yoga can really help to make a shift. And we practice that mindset shift, and when times do get difficult, it’s there. You know where it is; you’re able to have a neural pathway to the experience of being OK, pulling through all the threads, until you find it and say to yourself, ‘Here it is.’”



Patricia Schmidt, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, YACEP, is a certified yoga therapist specializing in pelvic health, accessible yoga and yoga for cancer support. She is a

Franklin Method trainer, Roll Model method teacher and somatic movement specialist. To learn more, visit PLSYoga.com.

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Publicize your event! This section hosts free and paid listings. Each month, we select a limited number of events — they must have broad appeal and cost no more than \$25 to attend — to list for free. Otherwise, basic listings are \$40 and enhanced listings are \$75. Submit free listings to calendar@naAtlanta.com and paid listings to ads@naAtlanta.com.

Saturday, August 3

Book Signing: The Simple Magick of Wild Things – 12-2pm. Embark on a mystical journey with author Dave Gaddy. Discover the untamed wisdom of nature and harness its mystical energies to bring a touch of wild magick into your everyday life. Free. Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore, 5531 Roswell Rd NE, Atlanta. 404-255-5207. PhoenixAndDragon.com.

Family Night Hike – 8-10pm. Explore the sounds and sights of the forest. Includes an animal encounter and a relaxing campfire where you can roast a marshmallow. Limited space available. All ages. \$15/general public, \$12/members. CNC, 9135 Willeo Rd, Roswell. Register: ChattNatureCenter.org.

Monday, August 5

Sacred Beats Drumming – 7-8pm. Join in our drumming circle led by Jen Huber as we clear away blocks, release emotions and gain greater clarity. Free; donations accepted. The Well of Roswell, 900 Old Roswell Lakes Pkwy, Ste 300, Roswell. 770-778-2051. TheWellOfRoswell.com.

Friday, August 9

Second Friday Walk in the Park – 9-10am. Explore parts of this 100+ acre nature preserve, which is largely mature forest. Lionel Hampton Park, SW Connector Trl, Atlanta. ParkPride.org.

Tuesday, August 13

Reiki Share – 6-7:30pm. Take turns both giving and receiving reiki. Open to all level reiki practitioners as well as anyone who is interested in learning more about reiki in a hands-on environment. \$20. The Open Mind Center, 1425 Market Blvd, Ste 500, Roswell. 678-629-3630. TheOpenMindCenter.com.

Wednesday, August 14

Becoming Wild, Willing and Wise – 12-2pm. HeatherAsh Amara's newest work re-imagines the Maiden, Mother and Crone archetypes. It's a revolutionary, interactive guide that playfully explores the energies that make up the flow of our lives. \$20. Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore,

5531 Roswell Rd NE, Atlanta. 404-255-5207. PhoenixAndDragon.com.

Thursday, August 15

Tarot Essentials Series – 6-7pm. Court cards, card combinations and tarot spreads. With Crissy Hester. \$ 25. The Open Mind Center, 1425 Market Blvd, Ste 500, Roswell. 678-629-3630. TheOpenMindCenter.com.

Saturday, August 17

Open House: Whole Body Detox Medspa – 12-4pm. Come find out about the health benefits of IV nutrition, full-spectrum infrared sauna, biomat therapy, vibration plate therapy, ION cleanse footbath therapy, medical massage therapy, reiki energetic facial therapy and meet our practitioners. Free. Whole Body Detox Medspa, 2410 Old Milton Pkwy, Ste E, Alpharetta. 770-674-2426. WholeBodyDetoxMedSpa.com.

Transmission Meditation Online – 7:30pm. A meditation to help the world. Sponsored by Share International USA. Free. Via Eventbrite. Info: 770-302-2208 or Info-SE@Share-International.us. Register: Tinyurl.com/2zhs8xea.

Sunday, August 18

The Healing Power of Plants – 10am-12pm. Join leading medical ethnobotanist and explorer, Dr. Cassandra Quave, as she shares the story of her quest to develop new ways to fight illness and disease through the healing powers of plants. \$25/nonmember, \$20/member. CNC, 9135 Willeo Rd, Roswell. Register by Aug 15: ChattNatureCenter.org.

Atlanta Streets Alive – 1-5pm. Spaces for people to walk, bike, skate, dance and play. Join us to turn streets into park-like spaces that connect our city. Peachtree St, 99 10th St NE, Atlanta. AtlantaStreetsAlive.org.

Wednesday, August 21

Holistic Approach to Under-Diagnosed Conditions in our Teens – 12-12:30pm. Join us as we delve into the world of under-diagnosed conditions affecting our teens. Learn about PCOS, MCAS and Potts from experts in the field. Free. Online. Register: Tinyurl.com/mr2s75w3.

Saturday, August 24

All About Pollinators – 10am-12pm. Learn about different types of pollinators, why they are important, and what we can do to support them. Enjoy making a fun pollinator craft and much more. \$7/nonmember, \$5/member. Dunwoody Nature Center, 5343 Roberts Dr, Dunwoody. 770-394-3322. DunwoodyNature.org.

Better Beliefs, Better Life!

Saturday, August 24 • 11am - 2pm

Are there areas of your life that aren't working? Limiting beliefs are likely culprits. Break free from those beliefs and explore how good life can be at this empowering workshop!

Abernathy Arts Center bit.ly/CCLCWorkshop

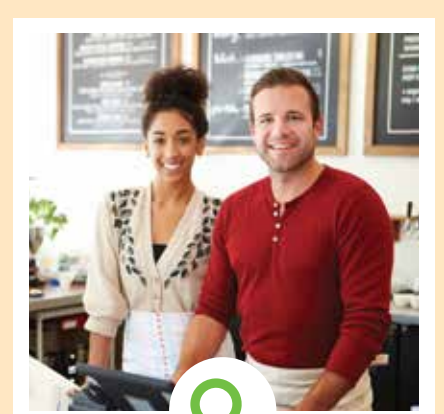
Sunday, August 25

2024 Georgia VegFest – 11am-5pm. A full day of education and a vegan food. Free admission. Atlanta Expo Center North, 3650 Jonesboro Rd SE, Atlanta. GeorgiaVegFest.com.

Plan Ahead

Tuesday, September 24

National Qigong Association Annual Conference 2024 – Sept 24-26. Experience 15+ expert-led qigong sessions, discover new techniques and connect with enthusiasts. Perfect for newcomers, beginners and experienced qigong practitioners, including those familiar with yoga and other health modalities. Savannah. Details: NQA.org/Annual-Conference.



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Books

WORDS OF LIFE - Cause and Development of All Illness. Free excerpt from the book. Gabriele Publishing House. www.gabriele-publishing-house.com. 844-576-0937

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Sundays

A Course in Miracles: Practicing the Presence – 8:45-10:30am. This virtual weekly study group aims at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence. Facilitator: Michael Wilkinson. An open and ongoing class. All welcome. Drop-in any time. New people are very welcome to join. Via Zoom. Unity Atlanta Church: 770-441-0585. Register: MWilkinson@leadstrat.com. UnityAtl.org.

Online & In-Person Sunday Experience – 9am, Adult Study; 9:30am, Meditation; 10am, Music; 10:30am, Service. Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta, 3107 Clairmont Rd, Ste A, Atlanta. More info: slc-atlanta.org.

Red Clay Sangha Sunday Morning Service – 9am, meditation; 10:30-11:30am, service & dharma discussion. Via Zoom or in person. 3420 W Hospital Ave, Ste 102, Chamblee. More info: RedClaySangha.org.

Grant Park Farmers Market – 9am-1pm. The Beacon ATL, 1030 Grant St SE, Atlanta. cfmatl.org/markets.

The Quest: A Journey of Spiritual Rediscovery – 9:30-10:45am. As Unity Atlanta Church celebrates its 100th year in 2024, we embark on a yearlong adventure with other like-minded seekers to revisit and apply the ancient Truths that are foundational to our beliefs and experiences. In-person and Zoom. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Ln, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Online: NWUUC – 10am. Via Zoom. Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation: 770-955-1408 or nwuuc.org.

SRF Atlanta Meditation Service – 10-10:45am. An opportunity to meet with other truth-seekers to commune with God and share spiritual fellowship. 4000 King Springs Rd, Smyrna. 770-434-7200. srfatlanta.org.

Meditation Open House – 10-11:30am. Discussion at 11:30am and tea at 12pm. Meditation instruction available from 10-11am for those new to the practice. Atlanta Shambhala Center, 1447 Church St, Decatur. More info: Atlanta.Shambhala.org.

Second Sunday Sober Bike Ride – 10:30am. 2nd Sun. Brings together people from all walks of sober living who are seeking fun and active ways to connect with likeminded people. BTA Bicycle Tours of Atlanta will provide a bike at no charge if needed. Bicycle Tours of Atlanta, 659 Auburn Ave NE, Atlanta. Register: Tinyurl.com/yjzutjf4.

One World Spiritual Center Sunday Service – 11am. To watch: OneWorldSpiritualCenter.net.

Unity Atlanta Church Sunday Services – 11am. Attend in-person or watch via livestream. Youth Sunday School is also held in-person at 11am for ages 5-18. Nursery service is available, 10am-12:30pm. 3597 Parkway Ln, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Online: UUCA Service – 11am. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta: uuca.org/live.

SRF Atlanta Reading and Inspirational Service – 11am-12pm. An opportunity to meet with other truth-seekers to commune with God and share spiritual fellowship. 4000 King Springs Rd, Smyrna. 770-434-7200. srfatlanta.org.

Sunday Morning Talks and Discussion – 11am-12pm. With Vedanta Center of Atlanta via Zoom. To watch: VedantaAtlanta.org.

Unity North Online & In-Person Sunday Service – 11:15am. 4255 Sandy Plains Rd, Marietta. More info: UnityNorth.org.

Meditation Classes – 4-5pm, Level I; 5-6pm, Level II. All religions, all ages and all people. Learn how to meditate for spiritual enlightenment. \$15. 5161 Brook Hollow Parkway, Ste 220/225, Norcross. Register, Andrea: 404-557-4306. MeditationWellnessClub@gmail.com. MeditationWellnessClub.com.

Monday

Online: Monday Night Meditation – 7-8pm. A live, instructor-led meditation and discussion. Develop a meditation practice by maintaining a moment-to-moment relaxed awareness of our surrounding environment, bodily sensations, thoughts and emotions. All levels. \$10. Register: TheOpenMindCenter.com.

Meditation & Modern Buddhism – 7:30-9pm. With Resident Teacher, Gen Kelsang Norden. Talks, guided meditation, discussion and Q&A. All welcome. Kadampa Meditation Center Georgia, 741 Edgewood NE, Atlanta. 678-453-6753. MeditationInGeorgia.org.

Tuesday

Online Meditation Open House – 7pm. A 30-min meditation and a 30-min discussion via Zoom. To watch: Atlanta.Shambhala.org.

Twin Hearts Meditation – 7-8:30pm. A short, guided meditation blessing the Earth with loving kindness, peace and good will. Donation. Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta, 3107 Clairmont Rd, Unit A, Atlanta. 404-417-0008. Meetup.com/TwinHearts-Meditation.

Metro Atlanta Sierra Club Meeting – 7:30pm. 2nd Tues. More info: SierraClub.org/georgia/atlanta.

Divine Connection Spanish Language Online Prayer & Study Group – 8-9pm. Unity Atlanta Church invites the Spanish-speaking community to "Conexión Divina," led by Rev. Xiomara Malagon. This weekly Zoom class features various topics for personal and spiritual development. Drop-in any time. New people are welcome to join. Register: xioma735@gmail.com. Unity Atlanta Church: 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Wednesday

Online: Joy of Breathing Class – 1-1:30pm. Learn the Joy of Breathing technique, prac-

tice a deep Pranayama session and enjoy the benefits. Free. Register: Tinyurl.com/muwwanm9.

Decatur Farmers Market – Thru Nov. 4-7pm. Rain or shine. First Baptist Church of Decatur, 308 Clairmont Ave, Decatur. 404-373-1653. cfmatl.org/Decatur.

Weekly Wednesday Meditation Class – 7-8:30pm. Open to all levels. Experience true inner peace. With the Venerable Nicholas Thannissaro of the Georgia Meditation Center via Zoom. To register: MeditationCircle.org.

Thursday

Tai Chi & Qigong – 9:30am. For beginners. \$7/at door. Meets in The Jefferson Parks and Recreation Dept, 2495 Old Pendergrass Rd, Jefferson. 678-510-9573. CarolOsborne.org.

Dunwoody Beekeeping Club – 6:30-7:30pm. 1st Thurs. Meeting features a program, followed by a question and answer session with the ability to meet and learn from other local beekeepers. Free. 5343 Roberts Dr, Dunwoody. 770-394-3322. DunwoodyNature.org.

Twin Hearts Meditation – 7pm. This meditation is an act of service. We use divine energy to bless the planet, our loved ones and every part of our life. With Atlanta Pranic Healing Center via Zoom. To watch: AtlPranicHealing.com.

Beyond Limits Weekly Conscious Dance – 7:45-9:45pm. With Marisa Skolky. An inten-

tional dance activated by vocal toning and singing during an hour and a half dance through our emotions, lifecycle, archetypes and levels of consciousness. Followed by a singing bowl meditation, a closing circle and community tea time. \$20. Beyond Limits Expressive Arts Therapy LLC, 4528 King Springs Rd SE, Smyrna. 770-235-3183. MarisaSkolky.com.

Friday

Qigong Exercises & Meditations – 12-12:45pm. 1st & 3rd. Led by Master Cheng, who has been teaching in Atlanta since 1976. Free/member, \$8/nonmember. Tai Chi Association, 3079 Midway Rd, Decatur. More info & registration: Tai-Chi-Association.com.

Meditation Classes – 6pm, Level I; 7pm, Level II. See Sun listing. 5161 Brook Hollow Parkway, Ste 220/225, Norcross. Register, Andrea: 404-557-4306. MeditationWellnessClub@gmail.com. MeditationWellnessClub.com.

Saturday

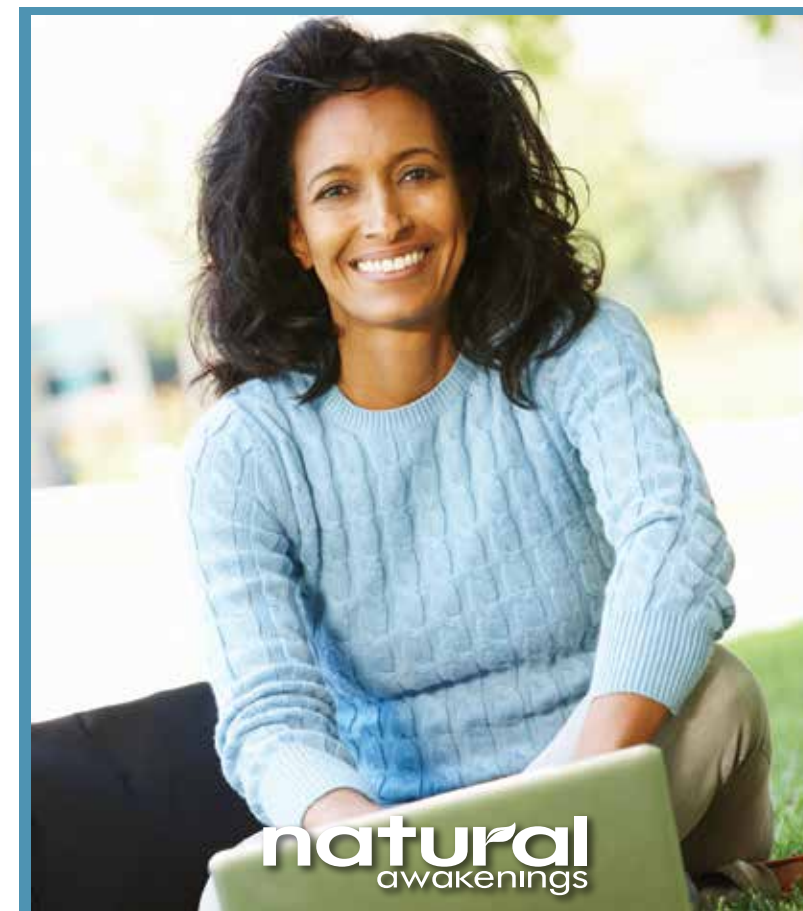
Morningside Farmers Market – 8-11:30am. Year-round. Offers organic produce, bread, pastries, grains, meat, honey, along with chef pop-ups, prepared foods, coffee, in-season fruits, and locally produced crafts. Morningside Presbyterian, 1411 N Morningside Dr NE, Atlanta. Morningside Market.com.

Dunwoody Nature Center Saturday Volunteers – 9am-12pm. 2nd Sat. For anyone in the community who wishes to volunteer. A wonderful way to start off your weekend in nature and service. To promote social distancing, sign-up is mandatory; limited to 24 people. 5343 Roberts Dr, Dunwoody. 770-394-3322. DunwoodyNature.org.

Oakhurst Farmers Market – 9am-1pm. Year-round. Fresh produce, meat, baked treats, and more. Additional offerings include live music and chef demonstrations featuring seasonal recipes. Sceptre Brewing Arts, 630 E Lake Dr, Decatur. cfmatl.org/oakhurst. Free Online Guided Meditation for All – 9:45-11am. Will go over basics and guided meditation. No prior experience is needed. Classes meant to come together and meditate and learn little by little. Via Zoom. Register: Tinyurl.com/y3x5yy2s.

Free Reiki-Infused Yoga & Meditation – 3:30-5:30pm. 1st & 2nd Sat. Vinyasa flow classes enable you to move slowly, while focusing on strength, flexibility, concentration, breath work and meditation. Free. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development Inc, 27 Waddell St NE, Atlanta. Registration required: 313-671-5804 or Tinyurl.com/4mnww3t4.

Reiki Share Group – 3:30-5:30pm. Last Sat. A gathering of like-minded reiki practitioners who participate in group healing treatments on each other. \$21. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development, Inc, 27 Waddell St, Ste A, Atlanta. Tinyurl.com/2rykarft.



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I Am a Spark

by Dena Martin



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One of the biggest obstacles I've overcome in my life was my habit of searching for my worth in what others thought of me.

For most of my life, I relied on other people to help me feel good about myself by complimenting my appearance or praising my accomplishments. But it wouldn't take long for my spirits to fall again, and then I'd need more people to notice me so I could feel better.

In my late 30s, I realized I wasn't happy, and the cycle of needing others to help me feel worthy wasn't getting me anywhere. I started meditating with the intention of getting clarity on my next steps to improve my life. I thought I wanted to start fresh in a few areas of my life; maybe I should find a new job or maybe move somewhere else. But what came to me instead was to focus on loving myself.

Initially, it felt like a waste of time. I had a very busy life, and loving myself was not a priority. I understand now that the part of me that rejected the idea of loving myself wasn't "me" at all. It was my fear and conditioned belief systems that kept me in the cycle, believing my worth was earned.

Loving myself meant getting out of my head and letting my heart lead. I am limited when I let my head lead—it can only draw from my past experiences to determine what is possible for me. Allowing my heart to guide me took learning to trust myself by addressing the source of my fears.

I minimized distractions—the radio, TV and internet—and I sat in stillness to acknowledge my feelings and hear my heart. In that space, my heart guided me through my intuition, and I felt an inner knowing about whatever action was in my best interest to take. When I let my heart decide, I felt inspired and lighter.

Through my practice of self-love, I learned about energy. I learned that the world mirrors how I feel about myself. I learned that when I needed others to like me, I attracted people who needed others to like them, too. Those who noticed me weren't just people I wanted to notice me; I received a lot of unwanted attention.

Then, it didn't feel good anymore. I didn't want people to like me for the way I looked anymore. I also learned that the people who tell me I'm not enough no matter what I achieve or how I look are my teachers. They're showing me I'll never be enough if I place my worth outside of myself. When I love myself entirely, I never need anyone to like me or approve of me.

What Do I Love About Me?

One night in meditation, it came to me to jot down three things I love about myself. I sat with it for a while, and I realized it didn't make sense to write down anything that was fleeting. I could say I love something about my physical appearance, such as my smile, but in truth I love myself the same when I'm frowning. I could say I love my personal attributes, such as my mental toughness, but I love myself the same when

I feel weak. I then understood the point of the exercise was to let go of feeling like my worth was conditional in any way.

Instead, I decided there are three things I love about myself: my life, my heart—which guides me—and my truth that I never need anything from anyone to be who I am. That doesn't mean I don't let anyone help me, but when I let go of thinking I need others to help me, I become limitless and create my world from love. When I decide I already have everything I need, then anyone who comes into my life to help me does it out of love. And when I think I need things from others, I stop being who I am in order to get them. I ignore my heart's wishes and bend to comply with any of the conditions I think I need to meet to get what I think I need.

Trusting that I always have what I need allows help from others to come in a time and in a way that's best for me and everyone around me.

Then I started to say these three things I love about myself before getting out of bed every morning—setting the tone for me to move through my day with love and grace:

- 1) I love my heart just because. She helps me release what isn't me. She loves me entirely. She helps me become more of me every single day.
- 2) I love me—all of me, exactly as I am—because I get to be here in this body, living this life, doing what I'm doing now. And there's nowhere else I'd rather be.
- 3) I love that I never need anything from anyone.

It's been six years since I started prioritizing self-love. Now, I no longer need anyone to be proud of my achievements or to tell me I look great. I know I am not my appearance or my accomplishments. I am a spark of light that's here to love myself entirely and to experience that love in all I do. And I am always worthy. 🌟



Photo: Clara Martin

Dena Martin is a personal development mentor living in Smyrna with her three kids, Max, Clara and Sydney. She can be contacted at Dena.M.Martin@gmail.com.



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