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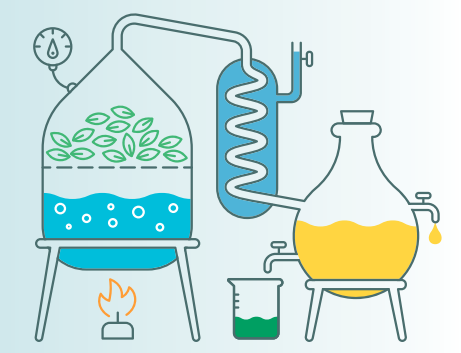
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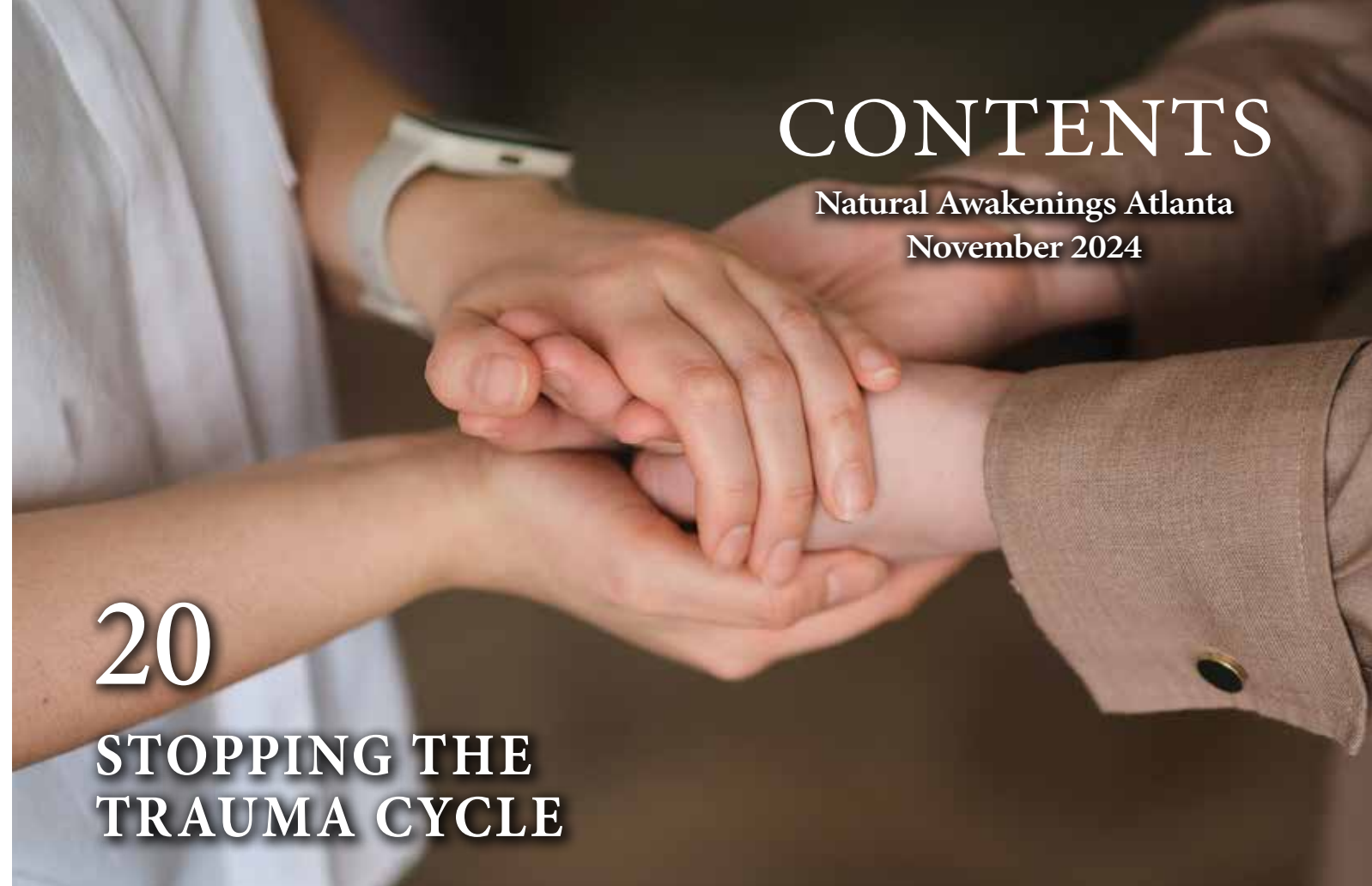
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 Managing Editor **Diane Eaton**
 Yoga Editor **Patty Schmidt**
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National Team

CEO **Kimberly B. Whittle**
 National Editor **Sandra Yeyati**
 Editor **Brooke Goode**
 Copy Editor/Proofing **Melanie Rankin**
 Layout **Flip180 Media**
 Natural Awakenings Publishing Corporation
 350 Main Street, Suite 9B
 Bedminster, NJ 07921
 239-206-2000
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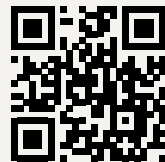
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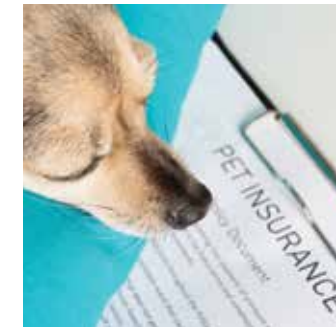
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Correction: In our October article "Beyond Classical: Exploring the Diverse Styles of Pilates," we reported that Emily Bradley said that Romana Kryzanowska's version of Pilates emphasizes "warmth and flexibility." It should have read "strength and flexibility" instead. We also quoted Leslie Clayton as saying: "The new equipment is evolving with science, and it helps address issues like fascia and the nervous system." We should have written: "Clayton says that the Pilates equipment continues to evolve, and science continues to evolve, for example, around fascia. In the midst of these trends, Pilates instructors are increasing the healing potential of their practice."

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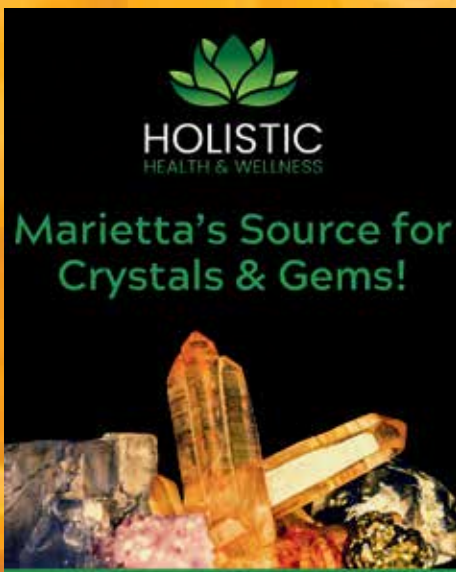


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Note: The following is an edited version of my Letter from the Publisher from our October 2020 issue.

I knew I had to write an endorsement this month despite the fact that *Natural Awakenings* steers away from all things political. I am under no illusion that my small but earnest publication holds any sway among Atlanta voters, but I believe that silence is complicity, that every voice matters and that the “hundredth monkey” is out there.

A few weeks ago, I imagined this space enumerating a long list of indictments against the current resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. But I felt uneasy with that, and last week, I realized why: The Law of Attraction.

The Law of Attraction proposes that like attracts like. Yet we often find that, as much as we dislike somebody, something, or some situation, we get more of it, not less. The reason is that our minds are more focused on the negative—what we don't want—versus the positive—what we do want.

Accordingly, my “endorsement” is to vote for what you want, not what you don't want. The state of mind you bring to the polling booth, optimally, should be one of love, not fear, of hope, not despair.

The beautiful thing about this is it works regardless of the candidate you support. If you're all about turning the page, imagine a future in which America is once again democracy's shining light, a place where truth finds its home, a country that embraces and cares for all its residents. Don't rage against the potential of an authoritarian dictatorship. If you're all about making America great again, do the same in imagining a future of bright possibili-

ties—don't push against immigrants and embrace dark conspiracy theories. The point is to approach voting with a positive and generous mind, not with a darkened mind and a hate-filled heart.

I know this might be difficult to do, but we can remember the words of philosopher and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Dr. Wayne Dyer's elaboration on this idea offers more instruction:

“The non-spiritual being hates evil and is determined to eradicate that which he believes to be evil. The spiritual being knows that everything that he hates and fights weakens him and that all that he is for empowers him. The non-spiritual being knows what he hates, and much of his energy, both mental and physical, is devoted to fighting what he perceives to be bad or evil. Spiritual beings do not order their lives to be against anything. They work for what they are for rather than fighting what they're against.”

So, with a month to go before election day, I encourage you to start now. Generate positive feelings throughout the month so that by the time November's first Tuesday arrives, perhaps we can collectively generate a tidal wave of positivity. Remember: Like attracts like. If you spend October criticizing, decrying, screaming, abhorring and hating, what type of voters do you think are going to show up in waves?

Here's a last thought—paraphrasing advice from Abraham—for those who believe they're once again saddled with a choice between the lesser of two evils and feel like they have to hold their nose while voting: When you are unable to generate positive feelings for a specific thing, think in more general terms. Close your eyes, focus on your heart space and remember one of the happiest moments of your life. Dwell in that feeling. When it fades, generate another memory, keeping your attention at your heart center. Repeat one more time. Doing this for 10 minutes should shift your mood.

Finally, I urge everyone to contemplate and meditate on the idea of a society that is based more on the Divine Feminine than ours is now; it is clear to me that our culture is severely out of balance in this regard. In an interview with Bustle Digital Group, Suzanne Kingsbury said, “Consciousness is basically divided up into the masculine side and the feminine side, and we need both to achieve our highest creative potential.” I encourage you to meditate on aspects of the Divine Feminine to attract what many of us ultimately want on election day—empathy, compassion and community. 🙏



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.



Hypnotherapy for Weight Loss Sessions Begin in Woodstock



Val Hudgins

Val Hudgins, a certified consulting hypnotherapist and wellness coach in Woodstock, is inviting local people struggling to lose and maintain their weight to take part in a trial for a hypnotic weight-loss system that incorporates the Virtual Gastric Band, a protocol developed by world-renowned clinical hypnotherapist Sheila Granger 15 years ago. The program aims to help people struggling with weight management to reduce cravings and control eating by creating the sensation of having

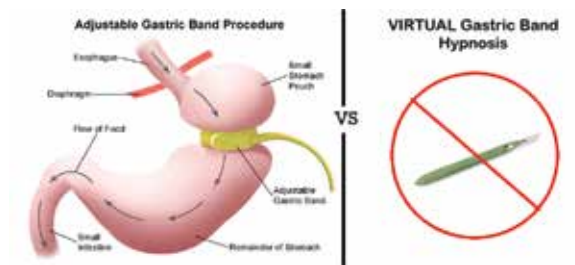
undergone bariatric surgery—without the actual procedure. Studies have shown the protocol to have a 95% success rate.

Trained by Granger, Hudgins is now enrolling participants for small-group sessions to take place at the Wellness Emporium, located at 1501 Regency Way in Woodstock. The program consists of four weekly hypnosis sessions designed to leave the participant believing they have undergone bariatric surgery to reduce the stomach size, followed by three sessions that deal with the psycho-

logical triggers that allow a person to overeat. Follow-up support is offered through private social media groups, nutritional and wellness coaching and other individual coaching. Classes are expected to start in late November.

“I am very excited to add this tried-and-true weight-loss method to my hypnotherapy toolbox,” Hudgins says. “For those not familiar with hypnosis, it is a method that enables people to help themselves through focused concentration. I love guiding people to success!” Prices vary based on group size and goals determined in private consultations. Private sessions are also available.

For more information, call 770-200-4223 or email valeriehudgins@gmail.com. The Wellness Emporium is located at 1501 Regency Way in Woodstock.



Stellar Power Yoga Expands Studio and Offerings



Miriam Frost

To meet its growing demand, Stellar Power Yoga is celebrating its eighth year serving the Vinings and Smyrna communities with an expansion into a larger studio. The new 2,700-square-foot space, located on Cumberland Parkway, more than doubles the size of its previous studio. Founder and CEO Miriam Frost is thrilled about the expansion, which allows Stellar Power Yoga to offer new wellness services, including wellness events, mental health

workshops, indoor cycling classes, women's empowerment events and children's yoga.

“We are incredibly excited to grow and better serve our community,” says Frost. “This expansion reflects our commitment to providing a space for holistic well-being and personal empowerment.”

In addition to the new offerings, the studio continues to provide its core services such as yoga, Pilates, barre, meditation and

women's empowerment events. The expanded space also includes a dedicated retail section serving yoga-related needs and a juice bar offering holistic, fresh beverages to support overall health.

“Our stellar instructors bring a wealth of knowledge and experience, creating a truly transformative environment,” says Frost.

Stellar Power Yoga's pricing plans are designed to be flexible and affordable. For more information, call 678-555-1234 or visit StellarPowerYoga.com. Stellar Power Yoga is located at 1675 Cumberland Pkwy., Ste. 202 and 202B, in Smyrna.





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Blissful Bowls

Celebrating With Soup

by Marlaina Donato

Whether we showcase winter’s root vegetables or come home to comfort food simmering on the stove, soup is a language of love with many dialects: from under-the-weather broths and velvety bisques to slow-cooked stews and stick-to-the-ribs chowders. A bowl of soup can bridge the mundane and the magical, inviting us to slow our fast-paced lives, share the bounty with loved ones and honor recipes of generations past.

“Every time I make soup, even if it’s one I’ve made over and over, it fills me with a sense of wonder that a bunch of disparate ingredients—legumes, grains, raw vegetables, onions, garlic, seasonings—always meld in a way that seems almost miraculous,” marvels Nava Atlas, the Hudson Valley, New York-based author of more than 10 cookbooks, including *Vegan Soups and Stews for all Seasons*.

Making Vegetables Shine

Eating seasonally can help our bodies transition into winter, and soups that incorporate cold-weather crops offer delicious versatility. “Thanksgiving is traditionally a time to be thankful for the harvest. Soups in the fall are typically a hearty mix of what you may have grown in your garden. These could be rich and creamy tomato, pumpkin or pea soups,” says Sharon Hapton, founder

and CEO of nonprofit Soup Sisters, a food-assistance program in 27 cities across Canada. The author of *The Soup Sisters and Broth Brothers Cookbook* attests that taking a little time to make soup “is a great way to nourish our spirits and reconnect with the food.”

In any combination, rainbow carrots, rutabaga, parsnips, leafy greens, sweet potatoes, mushrooms, leeks and winter squashes pack a punch in flavor, color and texture. Special-occasion soups can be simple childhood favorites dressed up with the pungent tastes of sage, rosemary, ginger, chiles or coriander seeds. Creamy soups, whether traditional or vegan, pair beautifully with wild rice, roasted pumpkin seeds or toasted pecans. Atlas suggests combining vegetables in surprising ways to take advantage of contrasting flavors, such as adding sweet potatoes and bell peppers to a black bean stew.

Broth Versus Stock

Although broths and stocks can be made using vegetables and/or bones and seasoned with salt and pepper, a broth is thinner in consistency and requires a shorter simmering time, whereas a stock can be simmered for four to six hours, resulting in a heavier texture. Nutritional bone broth is usually simmered for 12 to 36 hours to create a collagen-rich stock. All of these can be sipped for a soothing repast or incorporated into other recipes.

Bringing Out Flavor With Salt

Atlas notes, “Most soups benefit from judicious salting to bring out the flavors, but I suggest waiting until the end to add salt, giving the soup time to develop flavor first. And it’s surprising how much of a lift lemon and lime juice can give to soup broth.” For those monitoring their sodium, she recommends salt-free seasoning blends, like Dash, or Spike, a zesty low-sodium option found at health food stores.

The Legacy of a Treasured Recipe

Holiday time can be bittersweet, especially when lost family members are not at the table, but taking out an old, handed-down recipe is a wonderful way to preserve culinary customs and commemorate the family’s heritage. “Creating delicious food like soup from a loved one’s recipe is more than the ingredient list on a card,” says Hapton. “Use the silver spoon handed down from family to stir the love and rekindle the memories of loved ones. A natural flow of storytelling happens when we cook together, and the ‘dash of this and that’ can make its own lively conversation.”

According to Atlas, “Food traditions are a way to embrace each person’s unique history—where their ancestors were from, what was available to them, what they felt comforted by. Yet, despite all the different traditions, food is a great uniter, a fantastic way to connect us as humans.”

Presenting soup in an elegant tureen and putting out toppings such as chopped fragrant herbs or crushed pink peppercorns at each place setting gives soup a festive, gourmet touch. “Don’t wait for a special occasion to bring out the good dinnerware,” Hapton suggests. “Enjoy it every day, even in some small way.”

Ultimately, gratitude is the most important ingredient. This Thanksgiving, invite each guest at the table to ladle a bowl of soup for the person next to them, offering a single word of appreciation as a form of grace.

Marlaina Donato is an author, composer and painter. Connect at BluefireStudio.art.

FIND MORE RECIPES ONLINE:

Mellow Sweet Potato Soup
bit.ly/sweet-potato-soup-1124

Apple Parsnip Cream With Chorizo Sausage
bit.ly/apple-parsnip-cream-1124



Brazilian Black Bean Stew

This vegan version of Brazil’s famous national dish, *feijoada*, is an abundantly nourishing stew. Optional embellishments include steamed fresh greens and slices of mango and/or papaya.

YIELD: 6 TO 8 SERVINGS

FOR THE RICE

- 1 cup tomato juice or tomato sauce
- 3 cups water
- 1½ cups raw brown rice, rinsed

FOR THE STEW

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1½ cups water
- 3 to 3½ cups black beans, cooked, or 2 15-oz cans, drained and rinsed
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cut into short, narrow strips
- 1 medium green or yellow bell pepper, cut into short, narrow strips
- 1 cup diced tomatoes
- 2 small fresh hot green chili peppers, seeded and thinly sliced, divided
- 1½ tsp ground cumin
- ½ tsp dried thyme
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley or cilantro
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

For the rice, combine the tomato juice with the water in a large saucepan and bring to a slow boil. Add the rice, then lower the heat and simmer gently with the cover ajar until all the liquid is absorbed and the rice is tender, about 30 minutes. Cover and set the cooked rice aside.



Courtesy of Nava Atlas

For the stew, heat the oil in a large soup pot. Add the onion and sauté over medium-low heat until translucent. Add the garlic and continue to sauté until both are golden. Stir in the sweet potatoes and water. Bring stew to a slow boil, then lower the heat. Simmer gently over low heat with the cover ajar until the sweet potatoes are just tender but still firm, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Add the beans, bell peppers, tomatoes, one of the chili peppers, cumin and thyme. Simmer gently for 10 to 15 minutes longer, uncovered. The stew should have the consistency of a thick chili. Add a bit more water if it is too thick.

Stir in half of the parsley and season with salt and pepper. Serve over the hot cooked rice in shallow bowls and garnish each serving with a little extra parsley and a few slices of the reserved chili pepper.

Recipe and image courtesy of Nava Atlas.



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The Benefits of Holistic Skincare

by Susan Gonzalez

The world of skincare can be a complex and overwhelming one. Those seeking advice on issues such as acne or dry and aging skin have an abundance of treatments and skincare products to choose from. Seeking the advice of a licensed esthetician or skincare specialist is a great way to get one's skin evaluated, learn about treatment options and create an appropriate skincare plan to address specific needs. Holistic estheticians can do all that and more but do it without chemicals and harsh treatments.

The holistic esthetician's goal is to help a person develop a plan to promote overall balance and wellness, resulting in healthier skin from the inside out. They recognize that the beauty industry, modern society's beauty standards, and mass marketing have damaging effects on what is seen in the mirror. But they also recognize the natural desire to look and feel attractive and glow-y. The recent trends toward seeking skincare that is "age supporting" rather than "anti-aging" have increased the demand for estheticians who work from a mind-body-spirit perspective to achieve skin wellness.

The dictionary defines holistic as "characterized by the treatment of the whole person, taking into account mental, spiritual, and social factors, rather than just the symptoms of an illness." Using this definition then, a disease or irregularity of the skin would be the result of many factors affecting the skin from inside the body, not



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just what comes in contact with the surface of the skin. The skin is influenced by all systems of the body, including the circulatory and nervous systems, hormones, lymphatics and more. So, holistic estheticians collect information not only about the client's use of skincare products, but also about other lifestyle factors such as current diet, social support systems, living environment, exercise routine and mental stressors.

Training and Standards

While standards for a basic esthetician education varies state by state, there is no such standard for a holistic esthetician.

Obtaining a basic esthetician license usually requires attending an accredited esthetics school and passing the board exam to receive licensure for that state. The number of required school hours varies by state but is usually in the range of 600 to 1,000 hours of classes and practice. Subjects are usually broad, and they briefly cover holistic and conventional treatments as well as advanced invasive treatments. But the main goal of any esthetics school is to provide instruction on basic skincare knowledge and to prepare students for the state board exam that issues the license. Not much time or emphasis is placed on educating students about using organic and nature-based products and procedures.

Once licensed, skincare specialists can choose how they treat their clients and what kind of modalities and skincare products they use to address their specific issues. There are estheticians who work with plastic surgeons and medical spas to administer injectables like Botox and fillers and laser treatments, while holistic estheticians choose a more gentle and non-invasive approach.


Claiming the title of "holistic esthetician" can only come from obtaining additional, alternative education after basic esthetician school. Since there is no standard certification for holistic skincare, one would have to either be self-taught or spend \$35 to \$1,200 on online certification courses that can vary widely in content.

The only way to know what type of training a holistic esthetician has received is to ask them!


However, even among holistic skincare specialists, there isn't complete agreement on which products and treatments should be deemed "holistic" and which should not. Anyone can agree that applying oatmeal to the skin is holistic, but what about oat extract made in a lab containing preservatives? There are simply many grey areas that exist in the industry. And that's why it's important to find out about the philosophy and approach of anyone offering a holistic service.

What to Expect From a Holistic Facial

For most of us, holistic facials just feel better. That's the goal, anyway. If the client feels anything, it's due to internal chemicals being naturally released into the body, chemicals that have a direct effect on the structure of the skin. At the very least, feeling good reduces stress, increases endorphins, and opens the face, quickly softening fine lines. Long-term relaxation effects also help to keep the circulation of blood and lymph flowing to the skin, which supports its functions and supports a healthy aging process.



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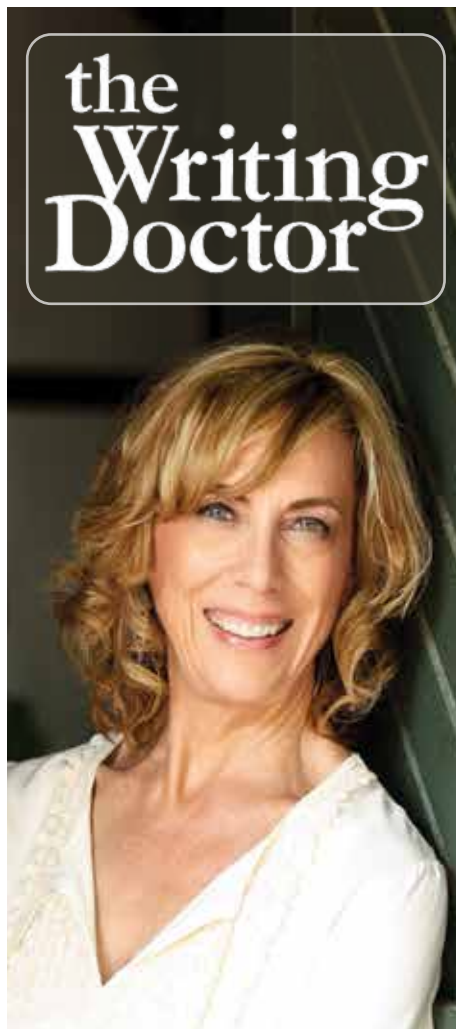
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Holistic facials are tailored to the specific needs of the client. While many spas and skin studios offer facials that offer everyone the exact same service, holistic facials are very detailed and are tailored to the client's needs so that each aspect of the client's facial services will be unique to them.

Cleansing

First the skin is cleansed or double cleansed with a natural oil-based or a balanced facial cleansing product. Then the esthetician will look at the skin with a bright light and magnifying lens to assess the health of the skin. They might also go over the client's routine to see if the products used are appropriate. Finally, they'll discuss lifestyle, dietary or any skin issues they are having.

Meditation and breath work might be brought in at this point to center and ground the client and to bring their attention to the present. This way, they'll be more aware of the sensations of the facial they are about to experience.

Exfoliating

After cleansing and evaluation, an appropriate form of exfoliation is used on the skin to remove dead skin and allow any products applied during the session to penetrate more deeply. Holistic choices for exfoliation might include a scrub made with oatmeal or jojoba oil beads or natural enzymes like papaya or pineapple enzymes. Steam might be used and a shoulder massage or neck and chest lymphatic drainage might be done during this phase.

Extractions—removing debris from clogged pores—is an option that is done manually.

Treatments

The treatment of the skin continues with any number of options, including:

Gua Sha: This is a lymphatic drainage and muscle-toning technique that uses shaped natural stones.

Manual massage: This lifts and shapes the muscles, improving lymphatic drainage and increasing circulation.

Essential oils: The client inhales specific essential oil blends to deepen relaxation and/or support the client's emotional needs.

LED light: Using certain specific wavelengths of light on the skin can penetrate the surface to increase collagen production or help fight acne.

Ice globes: Cold stones or fluid-filled glass wands are passed over the skin to help close the pores.

Facial acupressure: using finger tips or tools, pressure points are stimulated to help the flow of energy, stimulate nerves, and aid blood flow.

Facial cupping: Suction cups are placed and manipulated over the skin to tone and help circulation.

Microcurrent: Low level electric wands are placed on the skin and moved in a way that lifts the muscles of the face and also relaxes the areas that exhibit wrinkles. Microcurrent also stimulates the cells of the skin to create a healthy glow.

A holistic facial is concluded with an herbal mask or similar mask based on the condition of the skin and natural finishing products are applied.

Holistic estheticians will offer various holistic treatments like the ones described above as well as clinical treatments like chemical exfoliation, peels, and mainstream skincare products and label them accordingly to allow the client to pick and choose what's best for them. Good communication is key to getting the desired holistic experience. 🌿

Photo: Audrey Pruitt
Susan Gonzalez is a holistic licensed esthetician, author, nurse and owner of MOON Organics, a skincare company providing clean, healthy skincare and personal care products. Reach her on Facebook and Instagram or visit MoonOrganics.com.

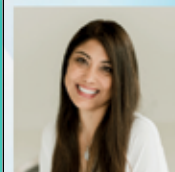
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What is Somatic Therapy? And how do I know if I need it?

You may have heard the term “somatic therapy” pop up in conversations about wellness lately, but what does it mean? More importantly, could it be beneficial for you?

Maybe It’s All in Your Body

The word “somatic” comes from the Greek word “soma,” which means body. In our modern culture, “somatic” refers to the physical sensations, movements or changes in the body in response to emotions or experiences. For example, when you’re anxious, you might feel tension in your shoulders or tightness in your chest. In wellness, somatic practices focus on the connection between mind and body—specifically, how the body holds onto emotions, stress and trauma.

Somatic therapy, also known as Somatic Experiencing (SE), has gained use over the past few years as scientific research has shown that we store memories, experiences, and emotions on a cellular level. Our bodies also hold data about past unprocessed events. It seems that many things aren’t “all in your head” after all.

SE uses techniques to help people become more aware of physical sensations, release stored tension and process emotions to help heal through the body. It is some-

times considered a bottom-up approach to treating trauma-related conditions.

Over time, identifying and processing bodily feelings that relate to safety, comfort and trauma help reduce the harmful effects of post-traumatic stress disorder.

A Case Study in Somatic Experiencing

When Lynn, a breast cancer survivor, first contacted me, she was having trouble moving past her breast cancer experience. Two years earlier, she had been diagnosed with and treated for stage 2 breast cancer, and her treatment included a double mastectomy with reconstruction, chemotherapy and radiation.

Like many cancer survivors, she was left with post-traumatic stress from living through a life-threatening illness and subsequent aggressive and life-altering treatment. Lynn was disconnected from her body, stuck in time, and unable to re-enter her life in a meaningful way. She was experiencing emotional and physical pain that she was unable to resolve.

We spent a few months focusing on her reconnection with her body, using several SE practices to help her regain embodiment, a sense of purpose and hope.

First, we worked on developing somatic awareness by cultivating Lynn’s body awareness. We worked on reconnecting Lynn to her breath using breathwork techniques to calm her body and nervous system.

Her breathing was shallow, and she was unable to identify and direct it. As she became more aware of those patterns, she gradually returned to a more natural, deeper breathing pattern. This helped regulate her nervous system and allowed her to feel more calm overall.

Through her newfound awareness, Lynn could begin identifying areas of tension and constriction in her body. With mindful breathwork, she was able to start letting go.

Next, we focused on grounding exercises. These exercises focus on the physical present moment, helping Lynn feel more connected to her body and reducing her constant anxiety. She added these methods to her “toolbox” to use whenever she felt activated or triggered.

Then, we began to identify Lynn’s resources that could help strengthen the sense of safety in her body. These included significant people in her life, relationships and

personal strengths that promote a sense of safety and choice. Through guided imagery, she also created her own “safe space” to go to whenever she needed to feel that sense of safety and grounding.

We then added gentle somatic yoga movements and stretching to relieve stored tension and allow energy to flow through the body. The combination of mindful deep breathing and gentle movements signals to the body that it is okay to release these holding patterns and reach a more relaxed state.

Lynn began to use her new tools to self-regulate. We all benefit from co-regulation, a feeling of soothing and safety received from others, and from self-regulation, which is our ability to calm ourselves. When co-regulation is unavailable, one’s ability to self-regulate becomes even more critical. When we are able to self-regulate, we can live more deeply, love more fully and truly experience the moments of life.

She also began to utilize body scanning. Through guided practice, Lynn focused on different areas of her body, noticing any tension, pain or sensations. Those who are suffering from post-traumatic stress are often disconnected from the complete sense of their body and unable to verbalize what they are feeling in their bodies.

Lynn was beginning to reconnect to her body. When we first started working together, Lynn couldn’t describe what was happening in her body. She felt numb and shut down. As with many cancer survivors who fight the good fight and then are “released” from treatment, she was deeply fearful of going about her life in a meaningful way. Paralyzed by that fear, she could not breathe deeply, move freely and truly experience life.

We utilized titration, a technique used to help people gently process traumatic memories. We titrated small experiences to focus on releasing or discharging the tension in Lynn’s body. We also used pendulation, which involves moving focus from stressful content to calming and soothing content to ensure it doesn’t become too much.

As time passed, Lynn’s healing began to look like dominoes falling, one after the other. The first stressor got released, and then others followed. Over three months, she achieved her goal—to reduce the stress and anxiety that had been gripping her and to be able to return to her life in a meaningful and purposeful way.

What SE Helped Accomplish

Somatic therapy helped Lynn to do the following.

- **Release stored tension and trauma.** Lynn was able to release the trauma that had become “trapped” in her body, leading to chronic stress, pain and emotional distress.
- **Improve mind-body awareness.** Lynn reconnected to her physical sensations and became more mindful. She began to recognize physical signs of stress, anxiety and difficult emotions as they arose and thus responded to cues before they escalated.
- **Reduce anxiety and stress.** Somatic therapy helped calm Lynn’s nervous system and reduce her stress. She began to feel more present, peaceful and in control.
- **Heal from trauma at a deeper level.** SE provided Lynn with a body-focused way to process difficult emotions, allowing her to heal without needing to relive painful memories.

• **Promote emotional resilience.** Lynn developed a stronger connection to her body, learned to manage stress and became more resilient, physically and emotionally. After our time together, she responded to herself with more compassion and to life’s challenges with greater clarity and balance.

What are Signs that Somatic Therapy Could be Helpful?

Somatic therapy may be helpful for those with the following conditions.

- **Feeling stuck emotionally or mentally.** If you’ve been dealing with emotional or physical pain that feels unresolved, even after talking it through, it could be that your body is holding onto that stress. Somatic therapy helps address this by

working through the physical responses in the body.

• **Experiencing unexplained physical symptoms.** Do you have chronic pain, tension, headaches or stomach issues with no clear medical cause? Unresolved emotional trauma sometimes manifests as physical symptoms. Somatic therapy often helps people understand the connection between their emotional and physical well-being.

• **Having a history of trauma.** If you’ve experienced trauma, your body may have stored some of that trauma physically. Somatic therapy provides a safe space to gently explore how your body might still hold onto those experiences and helps release that stored energy.

• **Struggling with anxiety or stress.** Anxiety often shows up as physical tension in the body, such as tightness in the chest, a racing heart or shallow breathing. Somatic therapy teaches people how to recognize these sensations and release the stress that fuels them.

• **Feeling disconnected from their body.** If you often feel as if you’re living on autopilot, disconnected from your body, somatic therapy can help. It helps bring more awareness to one’s physical sensations and promotes a sense of grounding and peace.

“Mindfulness not only makes it possible to survey our internal landscape with compassion and curiosity but can also actively steer us in the right direction for self-care,” writes Bessel Van Der Kolk in his book, *The Body Keeps Score*.

Whether you’re looking to overcome trauma, reduce anxiety or simply feel more connected to yourself, somatic therapy could be a powerful tool on your journey to wellness. 🧘

Based in Atlanta, Hope Knosher is the founder of Healthy Living with Hope, offering health coaching, yoga classes and retreats. She is a national board-certified health and wellness coach, a certified yoga therapist and a certified E-RYT 500 yoga teacher. Contact her at 770-789-7782.

Stopping the Trauma Cycle

Mind-Body Healing Strategies

by Carrie Gauthier



Trauma can strike anyone at any time. Loss, heartbreak, abuse, violence, displacement, accidents, disasters, health problems—the list of possible traumas is endless. According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, 70 percent of adults have experienced at least one traumatic event in their lives, and more than a third of youth exposed to community violence experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Trauma is a factor in most behavioral health and substance-use disorders. While trauma may be part of our lives, it does not need to define who we are or how we enjoy our lives. Healing from trauma can take time, but it is within reach.

Health Effects

Left untreated, trauma or repeated trauma has a wide range of short- and long-term effects on physical and mental health. Trauma increases stress and keeps the fight-or-flight response on elevated alert, resulting in the release of chronically high amounts of cortisol into the body. Initial reactions may include exhaustion, numbness, sadness, anxiety and dissociation. Excessive cortisol increases the risk of serious health conditions such as heart disease, digestive problems, muscle tension, headaches, sleep issues, weight gain, irregular periods, anxiety, depression and cognitive challenges.

Cycle of Addiction

Trauma is a common precursor to addiction, because individuals often turn to substances as a coping mechanism for their emotional

pain. The use of drugs or alcohol gives trauma sufferers a reprieve from their chronic stress by producing pleasure and reducing negative feelings, and may even slow their central nervous system. Untreated, trauma can lead to a vicious cycle where one condition feeds the other.

Holistic Healing

While medications such as antidepressants and antipsychotics can be effective in treating trauma symptoms, they may fall short in addressing the root cause. An integrative approach to trauma healing adds evidence-based therapies to tackle the underlying causes and promote long-term recovery.

Integrative Psychiatry

James Greenblatt, a board-certified functional and integrative psychiatrist and founder of Psychiatry Redefined, believes in a broader view of psychiatric care. “For example, if our patient is suffering from depression and we were to tell them they should exercise because it’s the best antidepressant we have, that could come off as incredibly insensitive, ruin our chances of gaining their trust and add to their feelings of helplessness and isolation. Alternatively, if we show them how to recover their motivation and energy, that is the way to begin the relationship.”

“Our bodies are different, and our genetics are different. How we react to stress and trauma are different too. I start with lab and genetic tests to see if there’s something I can optimize biologically. Then we supplement any nutritional deficiencies to restore their functionality and increase their energy. These tests also partially help inform the way we design the complementary healing modality plan. This is the piece that gets missed a lot,” says Greenblatt, adding that he tests depressed patients for a vitamin B12 deficiency, which may contribute to depression, anxiety and even psychosis.

Finding a Safe Place

Children are particularly susceptible to trauma, and an adverse childhood experience (ACE) can pose lifelong impacts. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 64 percent of adults say they have had at least one ACE, and 17 percent say they had four or more by age 18. ACEs can rob kids of the magic of childhood, disrupt their development and lead to maladaptive behaviors in adulthood.

Aimie Apigian, a double board-certified physician in preventative and addiction medicine and founder of Trauma Healing Accelerated, started her work with attachment and trauma by working with adoptive families to help their children with attachment insecurity. She explains that childhood traumatic experiences can result in “underlying mistrust—literally wiring a child’s nervous system, brain and body for survival—and overwhelm connection, security and safety.”

Somatic therapy is one modality that Apigian integrates to assist individuals on their trauma-healing journey, helping them connect with their bodies, learn to understand its messages and resolve stored trauma. Apigian explains that just 10 minutes of sequential somatic exercises over 21 days can restore a sense of safety. “For each person, the specific improvement or the degree of improvement will be different, but there will be an improvement as soon as we shift our biology into one of safety rather than of danger.”

By following an essential sequence to safely address stored trauma through somatic exercises, Apigian says people “experience 30 percent less depression, 30 percent less anxiety, 30 percent fewer digestive issues, 30 percent improvement in energy and a 60 percent increase in their feelings of safety. The essential sequence has to start with creating a felt sense of safety, then a sense of support and then opening up while pacing our process. It is such a powerful way to empower them for their lifetime.”

Reaching Our Inner Child

Inner-child work can help develop a dialogue to reach the place where we hold past emotions, memories, beliefs, hopes and dreams. “I tell people when they’re starting this journey, if they put their hands on their belly above and below their bellybutton and just let the hands be there, that will calm down an aspect of us so that it begins to feel safe. It’s called the basic self,” says Dr. Lin Morel, a trauma management specialist and founder of Beyond Words Group. “It’s an aspect of our consciousness that is roughly 5 years old, if you were to give it an age. So it gets very fearful, and if it’s not loved, it will act out.”

According to Morel, embracing the basic self can help people out of some of the darkest corners of trauma. No stranger to childhood and adult trauma herself, she empowers her patients with the W.I.N. protocol (willingness, intention, neutrality), which offers them a fresh approach to handling challenges while developing their intuition and regulating emotions as a neutral observer.

Mindful Self-Regulation

There is growing evidence that mindfulness-based practices such as meditation and yoga aid in shifting focus from the negative to the positive aspects of experiences. These techniques calm the nervous system and empower individuals to take control of their narratives and become more resilient.

A 2017 review of trials involving 650 trauma sufferers that underwent mindfulness-based stress reduction, yoga and mantra repetition was published in *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. The researchers concluded that meditation was an effective treatment for PTSD and depression symptoms as compared to the control groups.

A 2022 systematic review of 149 records and 11 peer-reviewed articles published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* found that those that practiced yoga had an increased sense of self-compassion, felt more centered, developed coping skills, had a better mind-body relationship and improved their relationships with others. Participants also experienced a feeling of safety in yoga classes that included others recovering from trauma.

Hypnotherapy

Hypnotherapy is a mind-body practice that

uses a trance-like state of deep relaxation to treat psychological and emotional disorders. Guided imagery, progressive relaxation and suggestion therapy are used to explore thoughts, feelings and memories that may be hidden from the conscious mind. Self-hypnosis techniques are also taught for ongoing support, empowering individuals to continue their healing outside of therapy sessions. A 2016 meta-analysis published in the *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* concluded that hypnosis is effective in alleviating PTSD symptoms.

“A miracle, simply, is a shift in the mind. Once you find the root cause of the problem in the mind and bring that to consciousness, we’re shifting from ego to true self, from fear to love, from illusion to truth,” says Matthew Brownstein, executive director of the Institute of Interpersonal Hypnotherapy. “Through hypnotherapy, that shift is actually remarkably easy. You can shift as quickly as I can snap my fingers. So, basically, when you change your mind, everything changes. When a decision is made, it stays in place until you choose again.”

Carrie Gauthier is a writer in the healing arts with interests in clinical and transpersonal hypnotherapy.

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Raising Children To Be Thankful

Benefits of Feeling and Expressing Appreciation

by Christina Connors

American adults are feeling increasingly troubled. According to a 2024 American Psychiatric Association poll, approximately 43 percent of respondents say they are more anxious now than in previous years (up from 32 percent in 2022), with current events like the economy, elections and gun violence driving 70 percent of worries.

As is often the case, children can be affected by the emotional state of adults in their lives. A 2022 meta-analysis published in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* reported that children of anxious parents are at higher risk of developing anxiety disorders and twice as likely to have anxiety problems than children of non-anxious parents.



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To mitigate this trend, parents, guardians and teachers have a powerful tool at their disposal: gratitude. By championing, modeling and encouraging a grateful heart, they can teach kids to temper episodes of anxiety and regain a sense of safety.

Benefits of Gratitude

“Gratitude is one of these micro-behaviors that creates macro-change,” says Roseann Capanna-Hodge, a Connecticut-based certified school psychologist, neuro-feedback provider, author, speaker and podcast host specializing in childhood mental health. “When we have gratitude, there are a lot of overall benefits to our health. Research has shown that gratitude can trigger the brain to release hormones and neurotransmitters that are associated with happiness, such as dopamine and serotonin. Having a gratitude practice as a family can even break negative patterns in the family ecosystem, moving toward generational mental wealth.”

“Humans are hardwired to notice and acknowledge negative experiences due to our natural instinct for survival, but we can overcome our negative biases by incorporating gratitude into our daily routines,” says Andrea Trank, an integrative medicine health coach, HeartMath trainer and trauma-sensitive practitioner in Norfolk, Virginia. “We can shift from feelings of sadness, anxiety and anger to feelings of hope and calm simply by focusing on what

we are grateful for. Gratitude also supports immune health, helps us respond, rather than react, to life’s stressors, and shifts the rhythm of the heart into physiological coherence, resulting in the release of oxytocin and DHEA [dehydroepiandrosterone], which promote positive feelings.”

Modeling Gratitude

One of the most effective ways to teach children to be grateful is to express our own gratitude with actions and words. “Forcing our children to be grateful doesn’t work. Model gratitude in a natural and authentic way,” Trank advises. “Notice the little things, and when you are out as a family, slow down and verbally point out the moments of beauty and generosity you see around you. Showing gratitude through action is the way your child will naturally be inspired to do the same.”


Practicing gratitude as a family can be fun, and it’s a great way to connect deeply with one another. Invite everyone around the dinner table to identify the things for which they are grateful or reflect on moments of gratitude that they witnessed throughout the day. Such positive conversations help develop optimistic outlooks for the whole family. Make it a routine for each family member to simply say “Thank you” upon waking, and to jot down thoughts of gratitude in a journal before the lights go off at the end of the day.

The Thank-You Note

Handwritten thank-you notes are being replaced by texts, emails and emojis as a means of expressing gratitude, but if parents encourage their daughters and sons to see the value of a written note at a young age, this worthwhile activity can become second nature for a child. While it takes a little more time than composing a text, scribing a thoughtful and meaningful written message that expresses gratitude can be read over and over again and reminds the recipient that they matter. When we receive gratitude from others, we are accepting a gift that strengthens the bonds of connection.

Research in 2018 published in *Psychological Science* points out that people underestimate the power of expressing gratitude and overestimate how awkward it will be, which may keep them from engaging in this impactful practice. This Thanksgiving, embrace the power of gratitude and share it with the next generation to make a positive impact on everyone’s mental health. 🙌

Christina Connors is a writer, singer and creator of a YouTube series for children. Learn more at ChristinasCottage444.com.



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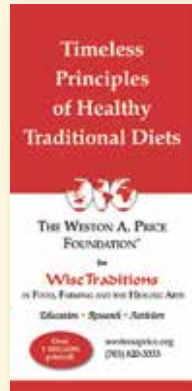
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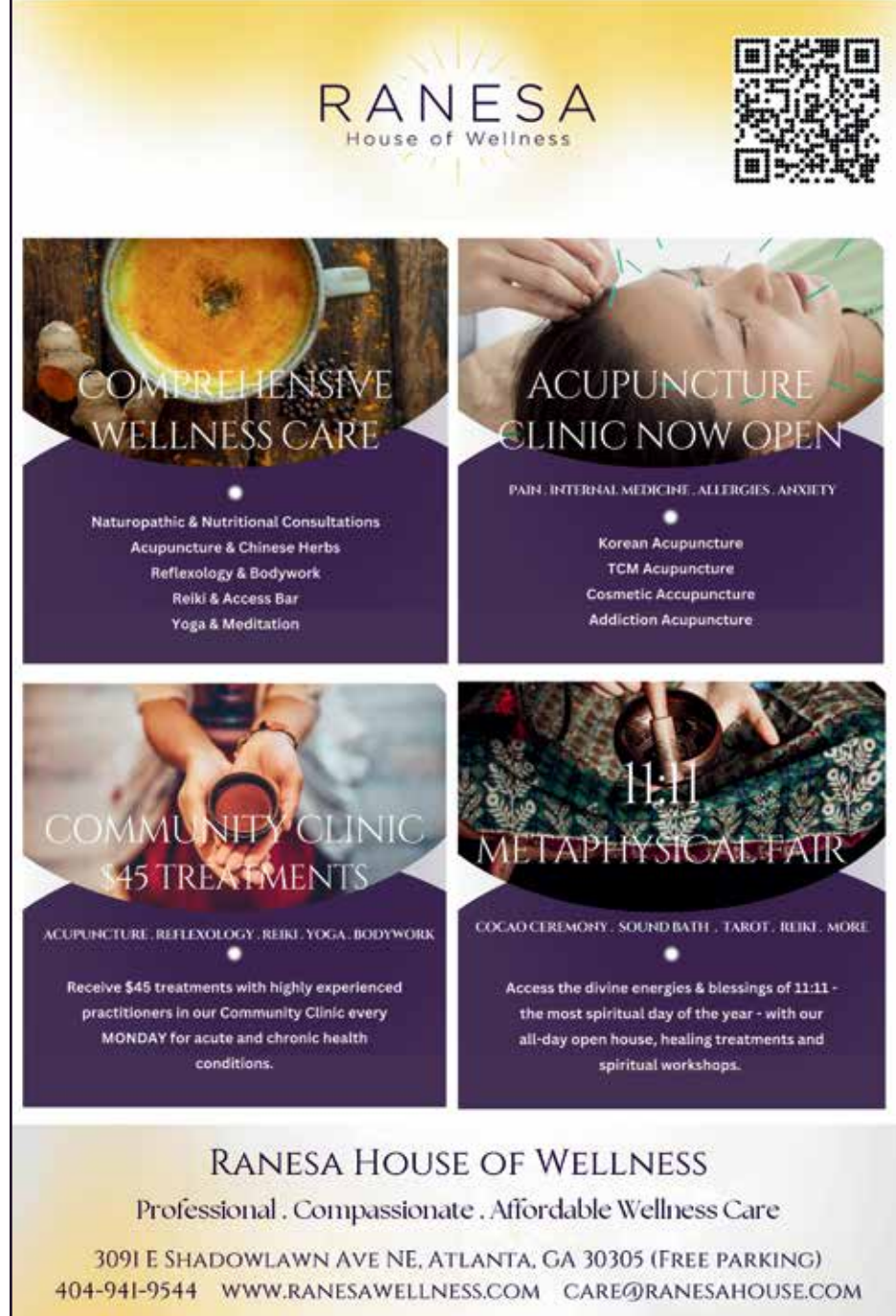
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Green Gadgets for the Home

Smart Choices to Save Money and Preserve Resources

by Deborah Bevilacqua

Many consumers are taking personal action to benefit the environment, such as reducing consumption, altering eating practices and modifying travel. In response to consumer demand, technology and product companies are creating new offerings to reduce carbon footprints, protect the planet and safeguard the environment for future generations. Here is a look at some of those products and technologies.

Dryer Balls: When dropped into the dryer, these spiky rubber balls separate clothes to expedite drying and keep them soft. Because they are reusable, they save money and replace the need for dryer sheets that are made from non-woven polyester and coated with liquid softeners, fragrance and, in some cases, volatile organic compounds. Eliminating dryer-sheet use reduces the release of microplastics and waste to landfills and waterways.

Hand-Powered Shredders: With a twist of the wrist, documents containing confidential and personal information can be destroyed while conserving energy.

Smart Control Plugs: According to Honeywell, about 25 percent of energy usage in a building comes from plugged-in electronics that sap energy when not in use. Smart plugs and power strips can detect when a plugged-in device is not in use and shut off its power or can be set to turn off using a timer, saving energy and money. They also provide energy monitoring features that allow users to track their energy consumption and identify high-energy-consuming devices.

Solar-Powered Device Chargers: Solar power used in portable chargers provides energy on the go. It also can be built into devices such as wireless speakers, laptop computer cases and other small electronics, eliminating the need to plug a charger into an outlet or use disposable batteries.

Green Navigation: Global positioning systems (GPS) units are being upgraded to not only help drivers get from point A to B and avoid traffic, but also provide the most fuel-efficient routes.

Smart Thermostats: These devices allow home or office temperatures to be set remotely from a smartphone app that tracks user preferences and energy usage,

allowing people to reduce their heating and cooling bills. Smart thermostat producer ecobee estimates that its products save more than 26 percent on energy costs compared to simply setting a fixed temperature of 72° F.

Solar Water Heaters: While initially more costly to purchase and install, solar water heating systems can benefit the planet and the pocketbook for years. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that they can reduce water heating bills by 50 to 80 percent and protect homeowners from fuel shortages and price hikes.

Green Living Apps: A growing list of phone apps help people live more



Jittawit21/CanvaPro



nana from naratrip boonroung/CanvaPro

sustainably, such as Too Good To Go and Olio for sharing surplus food; the Ecosia search engine that applies a portion of their profits to planting trees; Ailuna and AWorld, which help users form long-lasting eco-friendly habits; and HappyCow to locate vegetarian and vegan restaurants.

Water Monitors: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that undetected water leaks in the average household waste approximately 10,000 gallons of water annually. Installing a water monitoring system uses ultrasonic sensors to find leaks.

Energy-Saving Televisions: ENERGY STAR certification is not just for refrigerators and dryers. These TVs are 25 percent more efficient than conventional models and include the industry's most popular features.

Greener Smartphones: Although obligatory in today's world, smartphones come with an environmental cost. When upgrading to the next model, look for brands that use recycled materials, support responsible mining, and recycle and repair their products.

Electric Transportation: Using electric bikes and scooters around town reduces the need for cars and public transportation, and reduces traffic congestion and pollution. Remember to wear a helmet while operating these zero-emission alternatives that cut costs and the rider's carbon footprint.

Kitchen Composter: The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates food loss and waste at the retail and consumer levels to be more than 30 percent. Kitchen composters turn that waste into nutrient-rich compost for the garden by grinding and drying it. These appliances use activated charcoal filters to eliminate odors and sensors to monitor temperature, moisture and oxygen levels to optimize microbial activity and decomposition. ♻️

Deborah Bevilacqua is a regular contributor to Natural Awakenings.

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The Language of Empathy

by Clarice L. Belcher

If someone is in distress and says, “My job is horrible!” or “I’ve had the worst day ever!” it can be difficult to know how to respond in ways that are truly helpful. We want to be empathetic, but since most of us find it uncomfortable to see another person in pain, we often offer suggestions or tell them what to do or how to change their lives. However, none of these are actually expressions of empathy.

What Empathy Isn’t

Before we look at what empathy is, let’s look at what it’s *not*. Here are a few examples of non-empathic responses:

Advising:	I think you should . . .
Commiserating:	That’s terrible. She had no right to do that to you.
Consoling:	Everything’s going to be okay.
Correcting:	It’s not really that hard.
Educating:	You can learn from this.
Explaining:	I didn’t want to do it this way, but . . .
Evaluating:	If you hadn’t been so careless . . .
Fixing:	What will help you is to . . .
Interrogating:	What are you feeling? When did you start feeling this way?
One-upping:	You should hear what happened to me . . .
Shutting down:	Don’t worry. It will go away.
Story-telling:	Your story reminds me of the time . . .
Sympathizing:	You poor thing.



Liza Summer/ Pexels.com

While these responses aren’t necessarily wrong or bad, they are not expressions of empathy. They reflect an intellectual response rather than an empathic response and often distract the individual who is in pain from what is alive in them.

At the same time, the person saying these makes the situation about them, not about the person in pain.

What Empathy Is

These examples come from Marshall Rosenberg’s seminal work, *Nonviolent Communication*, in which he describes empathy this way: “When we are thinking about people’s words, listening to how they connect to our theories, we are looking *at* people—we are not *with* them . . . The key ingredient of empathy is presence: we are wholly present with the other party and what they are experiencing.”

As a presence, having empathy doesn’t mean we feel what they feel. It means that we show up fully present to what they feel and need without judgment or suggestions for fixing. Showing up fully is showing up silently, holding a safe space for another to explore what is alive in them.

If we use words, they will be in the form of questions. Because we cannot know what another feels or needs, we can only guess them, so we would ask, “Are you feeling frustrated? Do you need to be understood?” In this way, empathy is a very specific way of using feelings and needs, helping to draw the person out of their heads and into their hearts so they can show up whole.

For example, if someone says, “My job is horrible,” we might guess what their feelings are by asking, “Do you feel hopeless?” After asking the question, we wait, offering them a quiet space to explore their feelings to see if they’re feeling hopeless. It may be that they say “yes,” in which case they are beginning to move out of their heads and into their hearts, exploring rather than explaining.

Often, explaining sounds like this: “My job is horrible. Every day, I go into work and wish I were somewhere else. This isn’t the first

time I have had this experience. It is as if all the jobs I have ever had were awful. I remember one I had years ago. . . .” They might go on and on, explaining their jobs but never connecting to what is alive in them about their jobs. When someone guesses what they feel, it interrupts that discourse and enables them to explore more deeply what is alive in them.

If they do feel hopeless, then we can help them connect their hopelessness to a need because feelings and needs are deeply connected. Feelings tell us if we are meeting our needs or not. Our identified needs often hold implicit strategies for fulfilling them. Feelings and needs are deeply connected, and once a need is clarified, it is often found to hold an implicit strategy for meeting that need. To connect them to a need, we might guess, “Do you have a need for stimulation?” Again, we wait, offering a quiet space for exploration. When they see their unmet needs, they begin to deepen their connection to themselves and gain a clarity they did not have before.

If they go back into explanation—that is, go back into their heads—then we can guide them out of their heads by continuing to guess what their feelings and needs are. Often, when they connect deeply to what is alive in them, one of two things happen: either they get very quiet, or they sigh. It is as if the sighing is a literal, physical release from the feelings they had held without realizing they were holding them.

To be clear, offering empathy is not about asking 21 questions, one right after another. It is a matter of listening for the person’s responses to see if our guesses can help them connect to their feelings and needs. It’s not even important if we are accurate when guessing their feelings or needs. What’s important is that our guess helps to connect them to whatever they are feeling or needing.

For example, if I were to ask, “Are you feeling hopeless?” and they answer, “Yes,” then I have done beautiful work because they are now connected to their feelings. If, however, they say, “No, I am feeling frustrated,” then I have still done beautiful work, because I have helped to connect them with what they are feeling.

What’s Alive in Them? Or in You?

Empathy is not always a neat linear process. Individuals receiving empathy do not necessarily go from A to B to C. They may well go from A to Z to Q, but in the process, they are working out what is alive in them. Holding a safe presence for them to do so is a gift and a healing. When they discover for themselves what is alive in them, the experience becomes more powerful and meaningful for them.

Not only can we offer empathy to others, we can also offer empathy to ourselves. In *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict*, Rosenberg offers a series of questions that we can answer on our own when others are unavailable to offer empathy to us:

- What judgment do I make of myself when I’ve done something I wish I hadn’t done?



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to lift from the world the peril of war,
to relieve the hunger of many,
and to restore the well-being to the world.**

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- What need of mine *was not* met by my behavior?
- How do I feel?
- What need of mine *was* met by my behavior?

Further, we can ask ourselves:

- With these needs in mind, how could I have met all my needs?
- What did I learn from this?

“When people can practice self-empathy, they are much better able to learn from their limitations without losing self-respect—without feeling guilty or depressed,” Marshall noted. It is in this way, he wrote, that “we learn to create peace within ourselves and contribute to creating a world of peace for others.” 🌱

Clarice L. Belcher first learned of Marshall Rosenberg’s seminal work, *Nonviolent Communication*, in 2001. She currently offers workshops and practice groups on the topic. Contact her at belclar33@gmail.com or visit AtlantaCompassion.com.

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Clarice Belcher's Journey with Marshall Rosenberg

by Rick Baldwin

As a young newspaper reporter in Newport News, Virginia, Clarice Belcher discovered a career that utilized her English major yet sparked her interest in psychology. It was a pivotal experience at her church, however, which highlighted the profound impact of psychology and effective communication.

“In 2001, I was attending a church that was experiencing such intense conflict that it effectively polarized the congregation,” Belcher recalls. “The minister and his staff lacked the skills necessary to manage the situation, so they sought external assistance. I participated in a workshop where the facilitator presented a copy of Marshall Rosenberg’s book, *Nonviolent Communication*, and urged us to ‘read it and memorize it.’ I had never encountered such a strong endorsement for a book, so I read it—and I loved it.” Two years later, in 2001, she attended one of Rosenberg’s training workshops in Atlanta.

The principles outlined in Rosenberg’s work began to shape Belcher’s personal life, particularly in her relationships. “My partner and I had very different ways of thinking and expressing ourselves, which often led to frustration. As we adopted the language of nonviolent communication—sharing our feelings and needs—we deepened our connection, found greater ease in our exchanges and cultivated a stronger sense of trust. We learned that while our needs were often the same, our strategies for meeting them differed. Identifying our needs fostered compassion, enabling us to communicate more effectively.”

Encouraged by the transformative impact of this communication style on her relationship, Belcher sought to share these insights with others through classrooms and workshops. To date, she has conducted over 90 workshops and currently facilitates 12 practice groups, including those focused on married couples and individuals. While she originally conducted her workshops in person, she now primarily utilizes online platforms. “I transitioned to offering workshops via Zoom,” she explains. “Although the connection on Zoom differs from in-person interactions, it remains meaningful. This format allows me to connect with participants across various states and even countries. The workshops are free, as it brings me joy to share this work with others.”

Belcher believes that the teachings she imparts in her workshops are essential for inspiring meaningful change in society as they encourage individuals to embrace vulnerability. “When people allow themselves to be vulnerable, connections deepen, and hearts open to one another. Loneliness diminishes, and connection prevails. Participants often find it empowering to understand their feelings and needs, as it enables them to express their truths without causing harm to others. When we can listen to one another without judgment, criticism or blame, it becomes a game-changer—transforming what we once thought impossible into achievable realities.”

For information about sponsoring or hosting Belcher’s workshops, email her at belclar33@gmail.com.

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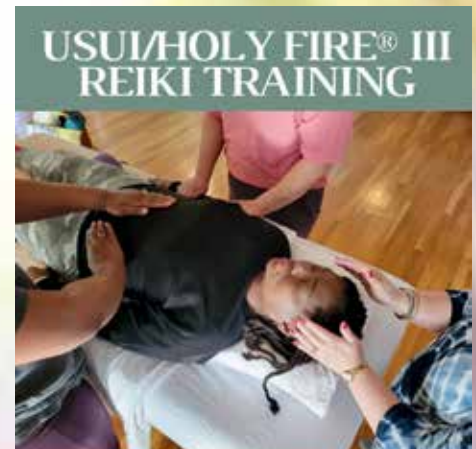
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Yoga Nidra

An Introduction to Yogic Sleep

by Patricia Schmidt



As November brings cooler weather to the Southeast and, for many, an urge to retreat inside, there is no more perfect style of yoga to consider than introspective yoga nidra. This ancient, simple practice provides the student with a chance for deep rest and heightened personal awareness, but it can also feel a little mystical and esoteric. Indeed, devotees swear by its benefits, but new yoga students can feel intimidated by its language and practices.

Yoga Nidra Basics

A basic definition of yoga nidra in Western yoga contexts is that it is both a series of meditative techniques and a state of deep consciousness. *Nidra*, in Sanskrit, means “sleep,” and *yoga nidra*—sometimes referred to as “nidra” for short—refers to conscious sleep, a meditative state of conscious—but deeply relaxed—awareness. Techniques related to the practice include muscular tension and release practices, body scans, intention-setting and guided meditation. Sometimes, one of these stands in for the whole; for example, a Western yoga teacher might refer to a body scan at the end of a yoga class as the “nidra” portion.

The many references to yoga nidra characterize it as something close to sleep. It can actually be practiced anywhere, but most commonly, students are encouraged to rest in a comfortable position, such as lying down on the floor. A fatigued person might actually go to sleep as well, but the intention is to remain awake and aware as best you can. Perception is present; the brain waves that yoga nidra usually tries to access are not the brain waves of deep sleep.

Nidra is different from other mindfulness meditation practices, which generally focus on becoming more aware of the present moment—the “now.” Yoga nidra encourages a deeper awareness of one’s self and one’s consciousness

through progressive levels of relaxation. One student shares: “I never know what it will be until I am on my mat. Sometimes, it is joy, or peace, or acceptance. I can’t wait to see what bubbles up in yoga nidra.”

Susan Mittleman, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, YACEP, a longtime yoga nidra teacher and yoga therapist, uses a closet metaphor to help students understand and experience the in-between state of deep personal reflection, which is one of the main goals of yoga nidra. “I always compare nidra to cleaning out your closet,” she says. “You’re taking everything out. So you go through the body in this practice, and you let go, bit by bit. You’re letting the mind move around to let go of things as you move through the body parts. And once you have this empty closet, then you can sit in there, in this quiet space. And if you have a deep intention, this is where you set that intention. Once you’ve emptied the space,

allowing whatever emotions to arise, instead of analyzing them, you just acknowledge them and let them go. And then you get to put into this empty space only what you want.” Satya Devi, RYT 200, a level II yoga nidra teacher and reiki master, describes the process as “a gentle journey to the deeper aspects of ourselves.”

Resetting the Overdriven Nervous System

Yoga nidra can benefit almost everyone. It is an extremely accessible practice requiring no props and little experience, with numerous physiological and psychological benefits. With the help of yoga nidra, an overdriven nervous system can learn to reset—an overarching benefit for the entire body-mind. Devi notes that, particularly in

Atlanta, “we are being bombarded with noise and becoming strained in our ability to tune it out. The practice of yoga nidra is a practice in how to hear the noise but reside in your practice and be the calm in the eye of the storm. Just as we work to keep our muscles flexible, we need to do so energetically as well.”

One of Mittleman’s longtime students, Emily Kean, reports that nidra “has become a big part of my self-care: the mental check-in and resetting of intentions really makes a difference in my mental health and balance.” Another regular to Mittleman’s classes, Dana Sibley, says that yoga nidra can be part of a wider self-care regimen that includes meditation and breathing practices.



Dana Sibley

Yoga nidra has been extensively studied as part of a multi-layered approach to healing trauma. Its transformational power is one of the reasons it’s so effective for trauma and chronic pain care, according to Mittleman. Generally, most students report calmer waking states with less anxiety and rumination, improved sleep and a greater ability to rest at ease. Sibley adds: “My mind stays calmer, and I’m less likely to get in a thinking spiral.”

What to Expect

Yoga nidra classes aren’t available at every studio in Atlanta, but where they are offered, they are well-attended and beloved. Class and workshop offerings can differ considerably as they depend on the teacher’s training and the studio preferences, but the intention they hold for them is largely the same. Most classes typically have certain steps in common, and it’s reasonable to expect some version of them in each nidra experience:

Come to stillness: After releasing tension with gentle movement or tension and release patterns, the instructor might guide the class into a constructive rest position



Satya Devi



Susan Mittleman

Whole Health Approaches to Women’s Infertility

by Dr. Susan Fox, DACM, LAc., FABORM

For many couples, starting a family marks a beautiful chapter of life. However, the path is not always straightforward for everyone. Tackling infertility can be an emotional roller-coaster, with emotions ranging from hope to heartache.

For women, the causes of infertility may range from health conditions like hormonal imbalances, ovarian dysfunction and endometriosis; and lifestyle causes such as poor diet, exposure to environmental toxins and weight management; to emotional and mental causes including anxiety, depression, stress and trauma.

Understanding the root causes of infertility is crucial; it’s about unraveling the complex web of underlying issues. In addition to standard blood tests, there are new functional medicine tests for finding the root causes of infertility challenges, including a comprehensive assessment of hormonal imbalances, a test to assess microbiome and detect gastrointestinal pathogens, and a test that provides both insights into nutritional deficiencies and guidance on diet and supplementation.

Research indicates that obesity makes it harder to conceive and leads to more miscarriages. Being underweight increases the risk of ovulatory disorder. A functional medicine or integrative health approach includes managing diet and improving nutrition that also works to balance hormones and microbiomes.



Lifestyle habits like smoking and alcohol and caffeine consumption are also addressed.

A mother’s toxic load can be passed to an unborn child through the umbilical cord. Detoxification prior to trying to conceive can improve not only the mother’s whole health, but her fertile health and the health of her baby.

While not fully understood, research has indicated a correlation between increased stress and decreased likelihood of egg fertilization. Incorporating exercise and mindfulness practices such as meditation and yoga is part of a comprehensive approach to creating the ideal environment for a healthy pregnancy and delivery.

Susan Fox is a Doctor of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine in Marin County, California, and has specialized in working with women and couples navigating fertility challenge for more than 20 years. Connect at HealthYouniversity.co and DrSusanFox.com.

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7
Post - Slow & Steady Brunch Meetup – 10:15am. Join Kira Wilsterman for yoga, then mingle and enjoy brunch at the new Egg Harbor Cafe next door to Highland Yoga Decatur. Support local and connect with the community. Highland-Yoga.com.

Yoga Meetup - Atlanta – 7pm. Join locals for a virtual festival to discuss yoga and connect with the community. Hosted by Talktime. Atlanta, GA. Sign up at bit.ly/Yoga-Meetup-071124

Yoga Meetup - Sandy Springs – 7pm. Connect with locals and discuss yoga at this virtual festival hosted by Talktime. Sandy Springs, GA. Sign up at bit.ly/Sandy-springs-071124.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8
Aura Photography and Reading – 5pm. Capture your energetic field with a photo, intuitive reading, and 14-page report. Understand your strengths and energy patterns. \$30. Space limited; 15-minute slots assigned at registration. AUM Studio, Alpharetta. Kelli. AumStudioForWellness.com.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9
Walking Each Other Home: Contemplation, Song & Restorative Yoga – 3pm. Explore conscious relationships with death and grief through contemplations, restorative yoga, and songs by the Threshold Choir. Sliding scale: \$45-\$55. Vista Yoga, Decatur. Shonali Banerjee, Susan Patterson. (404) 929-9642. VistaYoga.com.

Sound Healing with Spoken Words – 4pm. Join Michael Murphy Burke, award-winning sound artist, for a transformative sound journey with poetry. Experience deep relaxation through a sonic massage blending instrumentation and vocalization. \$40. AUM Studio, Alpharetta. Michael. AumStudioForWellness.com.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9 – SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10
Awakening of Inner Fire Women's 2-Day Retreat – 9am. Embrace your personal power and confidence through yoga, workshops, and creative expression. Focus on the solar plexus chakra to cultivate self-esteem and assertiveness. \$850. Clayton, GA. Yuliya. AumStudioForWellness.com.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9
Sound Bath – 7pm. Join Lauren Salgado for a peaceful hour of healing sounds from crystal bowls, chimes, and an ocean drum. Promote relaxation and balance your energy. Bring a mat, pillows, and a blanket for comfort. Highland Yoga, Alpharetta. Highland-Yoga.com.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10
Nutrition Basics + Yoga for Digestion – 12pm. Join Mallory Hazen for a workshop combining nutrition tips with a yoga sequence to support digestion. Includes breathwork, twists, and movements to stimulate the digestive system. Highland Yoga Westside. Highland-Yoga.com.

Fundraising Vin + Yin: Celebrating Festival of Lights – 2:30pm. Join Betsy Cherian for a Diwali-inspired yoga flow focusing on renewal and inner peace. Proceeds support the India American Cultural Association. Highland Yoga, Buckhead. Highland-Yoga.com.

Breathwork for Massive Transformation – 5pm. Uncover and release limiting beliefs and past traumas through powerful breathwork. Gain clarity and emotional freedom. Bring a mat, blankets, and journal. AUM Studio, Alpharetta. \$45. Branton. AumStudioForWellness.com.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15 – SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17
Invoking Peace – Explore Vedic chanting, yoga asana, and sacred gestures with Linda Spakman. Discover mantras that honor nature and invoke peace. Suitable for all levels. \$250 for the weekend, \$225 early bird by Oct 26. Vista Yoga, Decatur. (404) 929-9642. VistaYoga.com.

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16
Yoga, Song & Community Lunch - A TLC Yoga Fundraiser! – 10am. Join Ashley Erwin for Classical Sun Salutations and Shonali Banerjee for Gentle Yoga with sacred songs. Proceeds benefit TLC Yoga, supporting wellness for those experiencing homelessness. Eastside Church, 468 Moreland Ave SE, Atlanta. YourYogaRoadie.com.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17
Acro Play – 12pm. Join Danny for a two-hour partner yoga and acroyoga workshop. Build trust, connect, and have fun with accessible and challenging poses. No partner or experience needed. \$45. AUM Studio, Alpharetta. AumStudioForWellness.com.

Advanced Practice – 1:30pm. Challenge and enhance your practice with Kindall Carpenter by exploring advanced transitions and poses. Start with a foundational sequence and build from there. Highland Yoga, Brookhaven. Highland-Yoga.com.

Prop Workshop – 2pm. Learn how to creatively use props like blocks, blankets, and bolsters to enhance your yoga practice. Open to all levels. Eligible for 2 CEU hours for yoga instructors. \$45. AUM Studio, Alpharetta. Megan. AumStudioForWellness.com.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23
Accessing the Vagus Nerve – 12pm. Explore techniques to activate your vagus nerve and promote relaxation. Incorporate these practices into your daily routine for a calm and balanced nervous system. Highland Yoga Westside. Highland-Yoga.com.

Alignment: Safety, Stability and Strength – 1:30pm. Join Kate March to explore safe and effective alignment in common yoga poses. Ideal for beginners, those returning from injury, or anyone looking to enhance their practice. Highland Yoga, Alpharetta. Highland-Yoga.com.

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such as savasana, or corpse pose. In fact, Devi says she offers a practice that doesn't require much beyond settling into savasana.

Set an intention: It is common for yoga nidra to include the practice of sankalpa, intention-setting. Sankalpa is a statement, said in the present tense, of an already established state or truth, articulated as a way of connecting to the heart's deepest longing and true Self.

Be led: Once you've taken a comfortable position, the teacher leads the class into deeper states of relaxation with a body scan, a breath and awareness practice or something similar. Their goal will be to bring everyone into a state of deep physical release in order to facilitate an awareness of other layers of consciousness. As Mittleman says: "I lead you, but the journey is your journey."

Experience yogic sleep: The teacher guides the class to foster the lightest of awareness levels, dropping in and out of mindful practice, to encourage everyone to observe themselves and what's arising within their layers of consciousness. Devi calls this awake-sleep space "the thinnest veil between your waking state and the deepest part of yourself."

Both Mittleman and Devi stress the benefits of regular practice. Whether it's the rhythm and familiarity of a teacher's voice, the regular intention-setting or the practiced lingering in awake sleep, each of these will continue to develop over time and through repetition.

Yoga Nidra In and Around Atlanta

There are a few ways to experience yoga nidra in metro Atlanta. The most common is a longer immersion: teachers offer a one-and-a-half to two-hour session in which they introduce the practice and build lots of space around the experience. Mittleman offers this format as do yoga nidra facilitator Sarah Eiler, owner of Deep Rest Yoga in Atlanta and certified yoga therapist and owner of Curvy Yogini, Stacey Beth Shulman.

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

In contrast, Devi offers weekly classes, and Atlanta studios are increasingly offering yoga nidra classes as well. In this accessible format, the student is more likely to experience yoga nidra techniques such as a body scan as part of a movement class, but the weekly format also allows students to cultivate yoga nidra techniques as a practice. Devi plans to continue this weekly offering both in person and online. Sati Yoga, Southwest Atlanta Yoga, and FORM Yoga also offer weekly yoga nidra classes, serving neighborhoods in and around the metro area.

Finally, students can pursue the therapeutic application of yoga nidra in a dedicated format, such as iRest, a meditation practice that draws on aspects of yoga nidra and is specifically used for trauma recovery. Jill Elkin, an experienced iRest trainer in Peachtree City, offers both in-person and online options for iRest/yoga nidra program participation, as does Emory's Veterans Administration programming. 🙏



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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Saturday, November 2

Atlanta Black Men's Wellness Day – 7am-12pm. Join us for a 5K Walk & Run with free health screenings, vendors, live entertainment, and family-friendly fun. Help raise awareness and improve Black men's health. Morehouse College, 830 Westview Dr SW, Atlanta. bit.ly/blackmen-wellness-110224

Monday, November 4

Breathwork for Transformation: Unlocking Healing through Breath – 10-11:30pm. Learn five powerful breathwork techniques, including Wim Hof, Box Breathing, and Fire Breathing, to heal, energize, or calm the mind and body. Virtual event. \$18. Register online for this transformative experience. bit.ly/breathwork-110424

Friday, November 8

Ho'oponopono Guided Meditation – 7-8pm. Experience inner peace with Diane Annes as you clear harmful past memories using the ancient Hawaiian healing mantra, "I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you, I love you." \$25. Saltville Grotto & Spa, 2447 Main St E, Snellville. bit.ly/ho-oponopono-110824

Coffee House: Karaoke and Game Night – 7-9:30pm. Join us for a fun-filled, family-friendly night of singing, games, and potluck dinner. All performers welcome—no registration required. Bring a dish to share! Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Ln, Peachtree Corners. bit.ly/uac-coffee-house-110824

Saturday, November 9

2024 Atlanta Beltline Bike Tours: Northwest Beltline Trails and Parks Tour – 9am-12pm. Explore the Beltline's newest trails, green spaces, and historic neighborhoods on this 11-mile bike tour. Ages 13 and up. Starts at 900 Bedford St NW, Atlanta. \$10. bit.ly/beltline-bike-tour-110924

Monastery of the Holy Spirit Highlights and Insights Tour – 9:30am-12pm. Experience the beauty and history of this sacred place as docents guide you through the spiritual landscape where Trappist monks live, work, and pray. \$20. Monastery of the Holy Spirit, 2625 GA-212, Conyers. bit.ly/monastery-tour-110924

Mushrooms: Hikes of Georgia – 10am-1pm. Join us for a beginner-friendly hike exploring Georgia's natural beauty. Learn about mushrooms and the environment as our experienced guides lead the way. Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Center, Stonecrest. Price: \$15 to \$25. bit.ly/mushroom-hike-110924

Stronger Together: A Journey to Wellness Family Festival – 10am-3pm. Join us for free health screenings, application support for Medicare, Medicaid, and WIC, yoga, cooking demos, and more. Meet 40+ local wellness organizations. Impact Event Center, 2323 Sylvan Rd, Atlanta.

Women's Health and Wellness Summit – 11am-2pm. Join us for the 2024 How to Pregnant Summit, a free event for new and expecting mothers. Enjoy workshops, health screenings, vendors, giveaways, and more. Sequoyah Middle School, 95 Valley Hill Rd, Riverdale. bit.ly/pregnant-summit-110924

Advanced Wellness Open House – 4-7pm. Join us for an evening of community, food, drinks and fun. Enjoy mini healing sessions and demos, including Reiki, Pranic Healing, Muscle Testing, Laser Therapy, and Skin Care. Advanced Wellness, 1549 Clairmont Rd, Ste 105, Decatur.

Sunday, November 10

Intentional Journaling – 12-3pm. Explore the power of journaling at this transformative event. Whether you're a seasoned writer or just beginning, discover new techniques and prompts to deepen your self-expression. Price: \$25. The Lola, 621 North Ave NE, Ste D-100, Atlanta. bit.ly/journaling-111024

Thursday, November 14

Healing Sound Bath with Raye Andrews: Giving Thanks – 7-8pm. Relax and embrace gratitude with a healing sound bath to ease holiday stress. Suggested love offering: \$20-\$40. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Ln, Peachtree Corners. 404-735-2002. bit.ly/ua-andrews-111424

Introduction to Transmission Meditation – 7:30-9pm. Explore Transmission Meditation, a group practice that aids both global service and personal spiritual development. Free virtual event, open to all. Enhance your current spiritual practice

with this powerful method. Share International USA SE Region. bit.ly/share-111424

Friday, November 15

November Full Moon Sound Bath Session with Queen Yenn – 7-8pm. Immerse yourself in the healing energy of Reiki and sound frequencies for deep relaxation and renewal. \$20. Oyun Botanical Gardens, 3353 Washington Rd, East Point. bit.ly/yenn-sound-bath-111524

Saturday, November 16

Atlanta Men's Health Summit – 9am-3pm. Join us for a free event focused on the physical and mental health of men and boys, featuring regional speakers, door prizes and free lunch. Hosted by Men's Health Network and Ebenezer Baptist Church, 101 Jackson St NE, Atlanta.

Negative to Positive: Sticks & Stones – 10:30am-2:30pm. Men ages 16 and up are invited to join speaker and author Paul Posey for healing, interactive discussions, and breakout sessions. Light refreshments provided. Gresham Library, 2418 Gresham Rd SE, Atlanta.

Thursday, November 21

Nature Walk with Ranger Jonah – 10am-12pm. Join us for a 2-mile walk on paved paths, boardwalks, and dirt trails. Wear appropriate footwear, bring water, and hiking sticks if needed. Meet at the South Peachtree Creek Trailhead, 1400 McConnell Dr, Decatur. Free.

Saturday, November 23

Exhale: An Evening of Sound, Meditation, and Music – 6-7:15pm. Join Angelica Hairston and Shawn J. Moore for an immersive experience blending harp music, sound healing, and meditation. Free event. The Anchor, 645 Grant St SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/exhale-112324

Saturday, December 7

Shielding Your Spirit: How to Safeguard Your Energy – 2-4pm. Learn practical techniques to safeguard your energy and create spiritual boundaries. Early bird price: \$25. The Well of Roswell, 900 Old Roswell Lakes Pkwy, Roswell. 770-778-2051. TheWellOfRoswell.com/calendar

Saturday, December 21

Usui/Holy Fire® III Reiki Level Two Class – 2-9pm. Learn therapeutic touch techniques to reduce stress, balance energy, and promote distant healing. Prerequisite: Reiki I. \$250. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development, 27 Waddell St NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/reiki-1122124

It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.

— Henry David Thoreau

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. North-west 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.

Online: UUCA Service – 11am. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta: uucalive.org.

Twin Hearts Meditation – 11.00 am – 12.30 pm. 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.

Tarot and Mocktails – 1-2.30 pm. 1st Sunday. Designed for experienced and beginner tarot readers. Bring a deck of cards or buy onsite. Enjoy mid-day snack and drink. Learn about tarot and oracle cards. With Holistic Health & Wellness - 3372 Canton Rd Suite 116, Marietta, GA, 30066. 678-471-6587. Holistichealthse.square.site/events

Tuesdays

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/Twin-Hearts-Meditation.

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.

Wednesdays

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.

Meditation & Modern Buddhism – 7:00-8:15pm. With Resident Teacher, Gen Kelsang Dechok. Talks, guided meditation, discussion and Q&A. All welcome. Kadampa Meditation Center Georgia, 741 Edgewood NE, Atlanta. 678-453-6753. MeditationInGeorgia.org.

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.

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Weekly Grief Group with The Purple Priest-ess – 6-7:30 pm. A safe place to express and transform grief into a deeper connection. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Ln, Peachtree Corners. 706.502.2437. UnityAtl.org.

Thursdays

Beyond Limits Weekly Conscious Dance – Between 8pm in Smyrna and 7pm in Roswell, GA at Awareness Studios. With Marisa Skolky. An intentional 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.

Fridays

Pranic Healing Nights – 7:00 – 9:00 pm. 2nd Friday. Come & experience soothing psychological & physical healings with Pranic Healers. 11550 Webb Bridge Way Suite B2, Alpharetta, GA, 30005. For more info HealingWithMansi.com

Saturdays

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. MorningsideMarket.com.

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.

Tea & Tarot – 11am-2pm. 1st Sat. A tea party and tarot mixer for people of all ages and experience levels. Hosted by Amy Cathryn. \$25. Forever And A Day, 7830 Hwy 92, Woodstock. 770-516-6969. ForeverAndADay.as.me/TeaandTarot.

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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The Transformative Power of Gratitude

by Trish Ahjel Roberts

I had a fortunate childhood in many ways. I grew up in a brownstone in Brooklyn with two loving parents, three sisters and a grandmother who lived with us. Although “Mamma” was technically my great-aunt (my real grandmother died when my mom was a baby), she was an elder maternal figure to my sisters and me. Mamma had dinner prepared for us every evening at 6 p.m.—traditional Caribbean meals like escovitch fish, callaloo and rice and peas, as well as favorites like roast beef with Yorkshire pudding and gravy that she learned to cook from working as a domestic chef. Her meals were legendary.

My mother was a homemaker, so every day when I came home from school, my mom and Mamma were there to greet me. Mom embroidered our initials on bath towels, sewed our clothes and created intricate needlepoints to grace the walls of our home. She loved beautiful things.

For as long as I can remember, my parents had a second home near Amish country in Pennsylvania. In the summers, we would drive the three-hour journey for what seemed like endless days of swimming, exploring and long nights of board and card games. I had a happy start in life.

Like many kids—and even adults—I didn’t always recognize what I had. I knew some of my friends lived in small apartments, had only one parent at home, ate dinner at 9 p.m. and didn’t have siblings. I didn’t know anyone else who had a summer home. I took my family and my home life for granted—it was all I knew. It felt like an episode of *The Brady Bunch*—completely normal.

This is not to say my childhood was perfect. Growing up in the streets of Brooklyn could be rough. Tragedy hit my life and my family in many ways. I suffered a childhood assault. Two of my sisters battled sickle cell disease throughout their young lives. Mental health issues impacted our family, partly from the trauma and devastation of chronic pain and disease and partly from the attempt to resolve the shame that results from lifelong disability and a physical attack. Add to that the complexities of genetics mingled with garden-variety American stress and dysfunction.

Ironically, my walk with gratitude started at one of the lowest points in my life. It wasn’t built on privilege—it was born of pain. The first time I heard of a “gratitude journal,” I was at a weekend retreat in the Georgia mountains. I was a single mom, working for far less than my worth, hanging by a thread financially and struggling with self-doubt. I spent a lot of time thinking about what wasn’t working for me. That weekend, I learned to shift my focus to the good in my life—a peaceful home, supportive friends, a well-adjusted teenage daughter and my own healthy body and mind.

It’s been nearly a decade since that weekend retreat. Three years later, I walked away from being an employee and became an entrepreneur in the field of personal development. Now, my gratitude practice includes daily journaling, mindfulness, meditation and what I call a “gratitude shower”—a weekly ritual where I thank each of my body parts for their miraculous



function as I lather up. It’s so easy to forget to thank your eyes for seeing, your hands for holding, your heart for beating and your legs for walking.

Leaning into gratitude shifted my reality. I am a natural optimist and already saw my cup as half-full, but gratitude helped me to see my cup as overflowing. I wasn’t just “getting by;” I was living in one of the most vibrant cities in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. I wasn’t just a single mom; I was gifted with a thoughtful, intelligent, compassionate and healthy child. I wasn’t just underemployed; I was being nudged by the Universe to find the courage to pursue my passion and purpose as an entrepreneur.

Now, I coach people professionally. One of the things that always surprises my clients is that after working together for a few months, they become measurably happier. When asked, they will say their home is nicer than it was six months previously just because they’ve learned to appreciate it more. The power of gratitude is real. It changes the way we experience the world. It makes the sun shine brighter and the sky more blue. Because, at the end of the day, perspective is reality. 🌸



Trish Ahjel Roberts is the founder of the Mind-Blowing Happiness coaching company and author of the new book, *The Anger Myth: Understanding and Overcoming the Mental*

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- Mercury-free for more than 35 years
- Safe removal of mercury fillings: **SMART protocol**
- Biocompatible dental materials
- Ozone dentistry
- Lowest possible radiation x-rays


We are committed to you and your well-being, delivering the highest standards in optimal wellness & biological oral health.



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 care@atlDentalwellness.com

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