

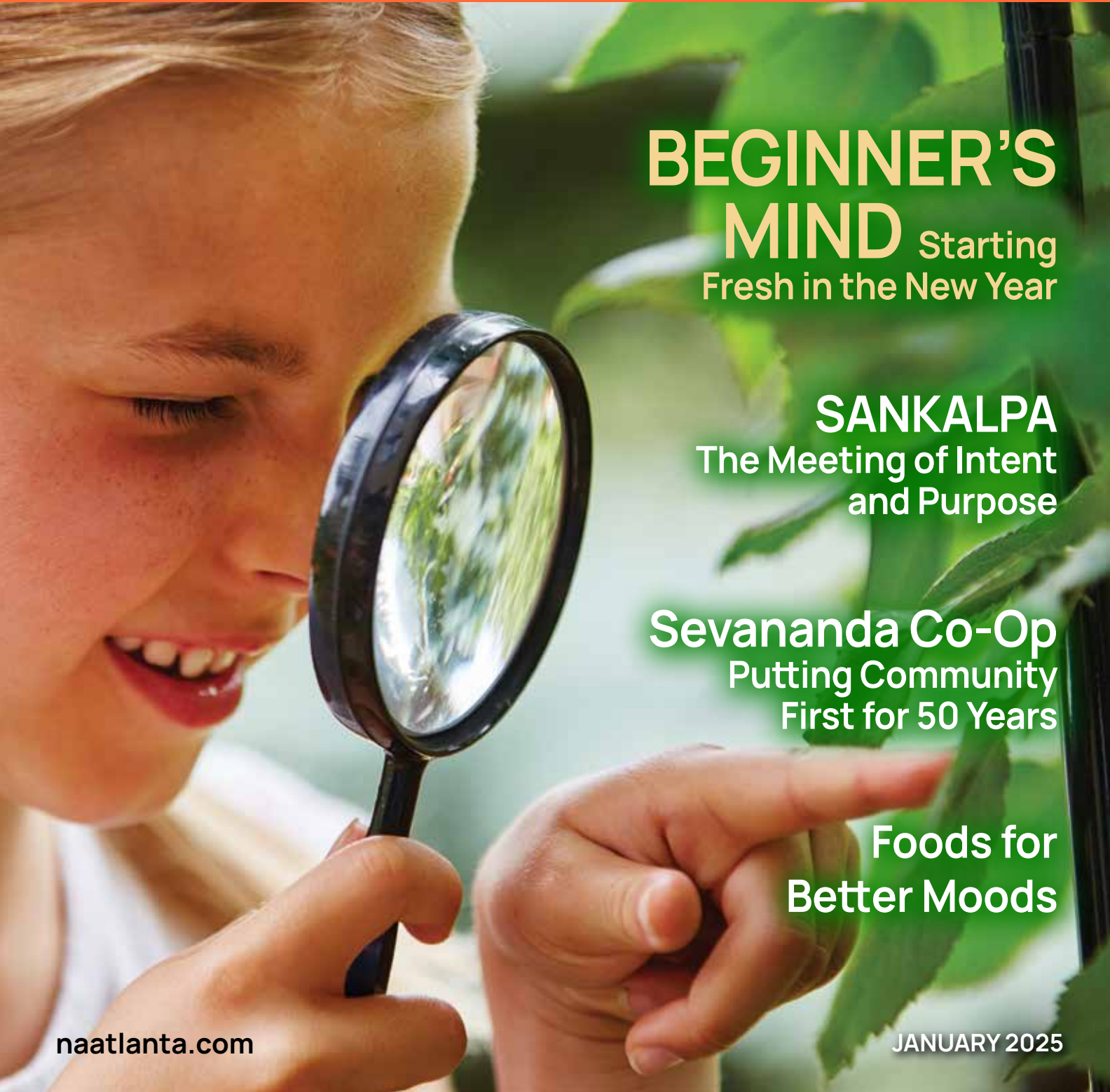


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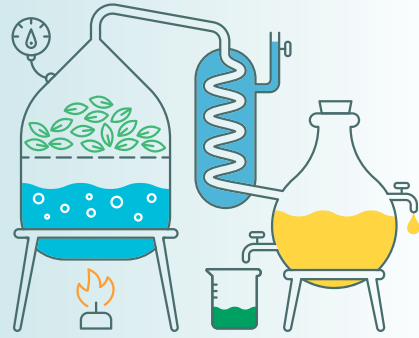


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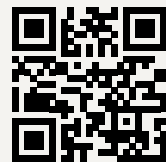
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Publisher's Top 10 of 2024

My Top 10 only draws from the articles that the Atlanta team produces, not those written by the national team. Also, there's a bit of cheating going on as we've produced four multi-story packages this year, and I'm including three of them, which, of course, brings the total number of articles over 10. Enjoy revisiting—or visiting for the first time—some of the best from last year.

1 Pranayama
bit.ly/naa-pranayama

2 Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communications
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3 Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar on the Journey Within
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4 What is Love?
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5 What is Somatic Therapy? And how do I know if I need it?
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6 Care of Melanated Skin
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7 Why Hire a Health and Wellness Coach If I'm Healthy?
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8 Integrative Energetic Medicine: A Comprehensive Approach to Energy Healing
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9 Kundalini Yoga: Awakening the Energy Within
bit.ly/kundalini-0424

10 Yoga Nidra: An Introduction to Yogic Sleep
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Getting Better at Resolutions



A big reason that I believe why many of us fall off the wagon is that we rely too much on willpower. Here, too, we need to differentiate between two ideas, just as we differentiated between setting goals and changing how we perceive ourselves. The relevant ideas herein are willpower and self-discipline.

Willpower is an effort exerted in critical moments over a short period of time and requires overcoming emotional barriers. Discipline is quite the opposite: it's less emotionally taxing and long-term in nature. The critical difference has to do with habits: Self-discipline is strongly linked to habits, while willpower is considerably less so, by definition. For example, I have a decades-long habit of working out regularly, so I don't need willpower to get to the gym.

I am an inveterate recycler... of New Year's resolutions. That's some admission for a person who publishes a magazine focused on holistic health and "personal evolution." Fortunately, I don't claim to be an expert; I just publish articles about the topic and try to improve myself in a variety of ways.

But if I'm honest, I fall short more than I succeed. Thus, the recycling of resolutions.

I found wildly varying numbers on how long people stick to their resolutions. The most optimistic one reports that 55 percent caved before the year was out and 30 percent did so in fewer than three months.

The most common reasons people fall short on their resolutions, according to a variety of sources, include a lack of specific goals, unrealistic goals and relying too much on willpower. Other factors include too many resolutions, lack of planning, lack of accountability and failure to reframe one's identity. Ironically, to some degree, this last issue conflicts with goal setting.

There's way too much to say when it comes to figuring out how to get better at keeping resolutions, so I'll just focus on a few things and hope they are of use to many of you.

I'll start with that last point, reframing one's identity, because I believe it has an all-pervading impact. Resolutions are not just about taking effective action but evolving one's state of being. For example, a common resolution is to eat healthier, which might include a goal to not eat sweets or refined carbs six out of seven days a week. While goals like that are necessary, the bigger picture is about becoming a healthier person with the mind and habits thereof. This suggests affirmation work along with dieting plans, i.e., "I am mindful about my health and eat for optimal health." [See our Sankalpa article in this issue about resolutions vs. purposeful intention-setting!—Ed.]

When it comes to instigating the change called for by resolutions, willpower is required. At the same time, while we take tiny steps—for example, instead of an end goal of meditating for 30 minutes, start by meditating for one minute—we need to figure out how a change in behavior can be made into a habit. For example, a person might use washing up in the morning as their cue to commence meditation immediately after.

There are three changes I'll make in 2025 to make it more likely I achieve my goals. First, I'll make *fewer* of them. Second, I'll identify an accountability partner. While I've hit diet goals before, my success rate is maybe 50 percent. The one time I recall it really working well was when I published my goal on Facebook; all my Facebook friends became my accountability partners, albeit unwillingly!

The third change I'll make is remarkably minor. It is to track progress, and it's actually something I already do. However, what I just realized while writing this is that doing so on the app I use doesn't provide the satisfaction and encouragement of seeing and being reminded of improvement. So, while I might continue using the app, in 2025, I will make paper versions of my trackers and mount them where I can see them every day. I'm betting that being able to see progress, or lack thereof, with my own eyes should be motivating!

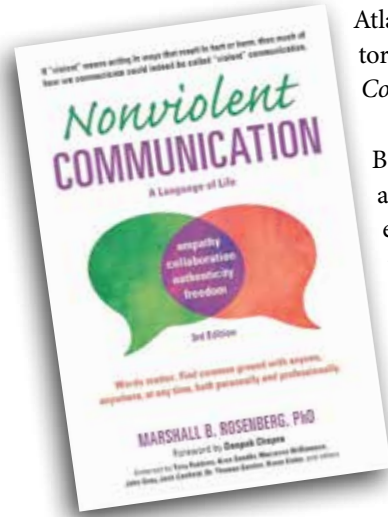
Whatever resolutions you make for 2025, may you smile broadly one year from now and feel very satisfied with the accomplishment of all that you set out to do. 🙏



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.



Belcher Offers Nonviolent Communications Workshop Online



Atlantan Clarice Belcher is offering a free online introductory workshop to Marshall Rosenberg's book *Nonviolent Communication* on January 25, from 2 to 5 p.m.

Belcher encountered the book more than 20 years ago and "loved it," she says, as it demonstrates the power of empathy and compassionate language. "[It] shows how to see beyond what people say to what people really mean, enabling us to see what's beneath the words they speak so we get the full picture of what's alive in them," says Belcher. "In so doing, we choose compassionate language that heals and connects over life-alienating language that leads to hurt and pain."

After using Marshall's insights to great effect in her marriage, Belcher sought to share them with others through classrooms and workshops. To date, she has conducted more than 90 workshops and currently facilitates 12 practice groups, including those focused on married couples and individuals.

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," she says, "connections deepen and hearts open to one another."



Clarice Belcher

For more information, visit [Atlanta Compassion.com/Events/](http://AtlantaCompassion.com/Events/), or email Belcher at belclar33@gmail.com.

Tom Blue Wolf Offers Indigenous Wisdom Workshops



Tom Blue Wolf

Photo: Sonali Sadeque

Earthkeepers, an environmental non-profit that promotes "honoring tradition, preserving the earth and fostering global peace," is offering a workshop series exploring Indigenous wisdom. Hosted by Tom Blue Wolf and Sonali Sadeque, the events take place over three months in Chatsworth, Georgia, and enable participants to deepen their relationship with Mother Earth.

The series begins January 25 with "Writing Your Own Death Song," a reflective session encouraging participants to honor life's transitions by crafting a song that

celebrates endings as sacred beginnings. On February 26, "Making Your Own Medicine Bundle" provides guidance on creating a personalized bundle filled with symbolic items, prayers and blessings that foster protection, healing and ancestral connection. "Making Your Own Medicine Drum" takes place on March 16 and teaches the art of drum-making with intention.

"Taking these workshops was a deeply transformative experience that left me feeling grounded, connected and spiritually renewed," says Janet Windwalker. "Writing my own

death song was unexpectedly liberating—it helped me honor endings in my life with grace while opening space for new beginnings. The drum-making workshop was the most powerful; holding the drum I created, I felt the heartbeat of Mother Earth resonating through me, reminding me of my connection to all living things."

Earthkeepers asks for minimum donations of \$200 to attend the January event, \$300 for February, and \$350 for March. The full series discounted rate is \$750, and all donations are tax-deductible. The January workshop runs from noon to 5:00 p.m., and the remaining two run from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. RSVP and donations are required at least 10 days prior to each session.

For more information, text 770-337-8735 or email BlueWolf@EarthKeepers.net. Workshops are offered at 595 Emery Creek Road in Chatsworth.

Metaphysical Shops Showcase Local Art, Artists



Flowers by Donna Pinter

ARTIST DONNA PINTER FEATURED AT THE WELL OF ROSWELL

The Well of Roswell is hosting an art exhibit featuring internationally renowned artist Donna Pinter now through March 14. Pinter's large-format oil paintings will be on display at the metaphysical and holistic health center, although she also produces large-scale public art and glass and clay mosaics. She has created a public mosaic in Roswell, where she now resides.

Pinter has participated in more than 50 group- and 30 solo exhibitions. She has received numerous awards and has been commissioned by the Russian Bolshoi Ballet and the Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center. "I have been a fan of Donna's for years as well as a personal friend," says The Well of Roswell's co-owner Becky Arrington. "Her ballet series perfectly captured the movements of dancers while her koi series, with its vibrant colors and movement, create lively paintings."

An open house for the exhibit will take place January 12, with a special reception for the artist on February 16.

For more information, visit DonnaPinter.com. The Well of Roswell is located at 900 Old Roswell Lakes Parkway, #300, in Roswell.

SPIRITUAL ABSTRACTS AT THE WELLNESS EMPORIUM

The Wellness Emporium, a community of certified wellness practitioners at 1501 Re-

gency Way in Woodstock, is showcasing the ethereal works of Mahara Tucker Jones, a self-taught artist inspired by the serene blues and greens of her coastal upbringing. The exhibit runs now through February 28 and features large-scale spiritual nonrepresentational art designed to inspire relaxation and hope. "Mahara's work is playful and uplifting, evoking inspiration and spirituality," says Valerie Hudgins, CHC, RYT-200, owner of the Wellness Emporium. "When the opportunity arose to show off several of her paintings, I jumped at the chance. Her dreamy abstract paintings foster relaxation in our therapy rooms." The Wellness Emporium will host an artist reception and open house January 11 from noon to 4 p.m.



Dreamer in the Woods by Mahara Tucker Jones

The Wellness Emporium is located at 1501 Regency Way in Woodstock.

PHOENIX & DRAGON SHOWCASES EMPLOYEE ART

The Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore in Sandy Springs is showcasing the artistic talents of its staff in its annual art exhibit running through February 16. Visitors can explore a diverse collection of artworks, including paintings, handmade spell bottles and fiber crafts.

"The vast range of talents on display allows viewers to get a glimpse into the diversity of spirituality [of] our staff, which plays a huge role in how our store operates," says Andi Grigo, Employee Art Gallery Coordinator. "Phoenix & Dragon has a history of employing staff members who also have experience in the arts in one form or another. We like to offer this gallery to our staff as a way to show appreciation and gratitude for these skills, allowing us to exhibit their talents to their fullest." All pieces are available for purchase.

For more information, call 404-255-5207 or visit PhoenixAndDragon.com. Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore is located at 5531 Roswell Road NE in Sandy Springs.



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Sevananda

50 Years of Community-Centered Growth and Resilience

by Rick Baldwin



Sevananda staff on Halloween 2024

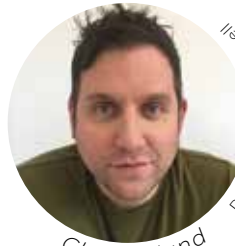
Fifty years ago, as America grappled with the complexities of the Vietnam War and global cultural shifts, a small yet pioneering grocery cooperative opened its doors in Atlanta. In 1974, Sevananda Co-op began as a humble alternative to conventional grocery stores, offering fresh, organic produce and holistic products long before they became mainstream. While iconic moments like Muhammad Ali's "Thrilla in Manila" boxing match with Joe Frazer and the debut of *Saturday Night Live* were capturing the world's attention, Sevananda was quietly laying the foundation for a health-conscious and community-driven food system that continues to thrive today.

At its inception, the landscape for healthy, sustainable groceries was vastly different. Chain grocery stores like Kroger and Publix largely offered conventional foods with minimal options for those seeking vegetarian or organic products. The health food industry was not yet competitive in the way it is now, with giants like Whole Foods, Sprouts and Trader Joe's dominating the market. In contrast, Sevananda was a cooperative—it was owned by its members and employees, both of whom played a role in making decisions about the products stocked on the shelves. Its cooperative model distinguished Sevananda from its competitors and helped build a loyal following of shoppers who valued not only the products but the store's mission to serve the community.

Deep Roots

Today, Sevananda is still operating under this cooperative structure, and much of its strength lies in its deep roots in Atlanta's wellness and health-conscious communities. But the path hasn't always been smooth. Chris Roland, Sevananda's general manager since 2023, arrived at a critical moment in the co-op's history. After years of steady growth, the store faced significant financial challenges, particularly after the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We were on a really great trajectory; then we had some major equipment issues in 2019, which created challenges for us," recalls Jessica McMorris, Sevananda's board president. "But it was the pandemic that really hit us hard. Coming out of the pandemic, we were not in a great financial position. Chris came in and helped steer us toward recovery."

Roland's career in co-op management began over 20 years ago when he was working part-time at a small co-op in Greensboro, North Carolina. He quickly fell in love with the cooperative model and went on to take on various roles in co-ops across the country. "I've worked everywhere from the finance side to the operational side, helping open new stores and assisting co-ops through difficult transitions," Roland says. His experience, combined with his passion for the cooperative business model, made him a valuable asset to Sevananda as it navigated financial recovery.



Chris Roland

During Roland's first few months at Sevananda, the co-op faced a series of difficult decisions. Cuts had to be made to expenses, and layoffs were unavoidable. Employee benefits, including health insurance, had to be restructured to help stabilize the business. Additionally, beloved community programs, such as yoga classes, cooking demos and wellness seminars, were temporarily suspended. "There was a full calendar of events that we offered here every day. But

when things hit hard financially, we had to pause a lot of that," Roland explains. "We're starting to rebuild that calendar, but it's a process."



Jessica McMorris

A Community Wellness Resource

Sevananda has always been more than just a grocery store; it is a community hub. It is a wellness center and a place where people can come together to learn, share and grow. "Our following in the wellness community is unmatched," Roland proudly states. "We have two certified natural herbalists on staff, and people come to them not just for advice, but as their healthcare providers. Many of our customers have been coming here for generations, bringing their children for the same remedies they relied on when they were young."

For Roland and McMorris, restoring Sevananda's role as a community gathering space has been a top priority. The co-op has started to offer a limited number of events once again, such as children's tutoring sessions and yoga classes, with plans to expand this programming further in the coming months. "We're looking to offer tai chi soon, and we want to build that calendar back up to become a real resource for the community," Roland says.

At its core, Sevananda has always been committed to providing high-quality, healthy food—something that sets it apart from big box grocery stores. The co-op has always placed an emphasis on sourcing products from local growers and artisans; doing so doesn't just support the local economy, it provides customers with fresh, sustainable options. From fresh produce



to baked goods and from dairy alternatives to cleaning products, Sevananda's shelves are stocked with items that align with the values of health-conscious shoppers.

Supporting the Local Farming Community

As part of this commitment, Sevananda is set to join the Wholesome Wave program, a national initiative that offers locally grown produce at a 50% discount. Roland sees this as a major win for both the co-op and the local farming community. "Sometimes local can mean expensive because it's grown on a smaller scale, and that can make it less appealing to shoppers," Roland explains. "But through Wholesome Wave, we'll be able to offer produce at a discounted price, which benefits local farmers and allows us to pass those savings on to our customers."

For Sevananda member Emily Toledo, the co-op's bulk foods section and zero-waste initiatives are key reasons why she shops there regularly. "I love their bulk foods area, especially for things like trail mix, coffee, rice and spices. I've discovered so many great local products, from immunity-boosting juices to organic teas. Sevananda has a lot to offer, especially if you care about sustainability and reducing waste."



Emily Toledo

Sevananda's hot bar is another popular feature. "Where else in Atlanta can you get a vegan breakfast seven days a week?" Roland asks. "We serve the best damn vegan biscuits in the city, and people love them. Our hot bar food is something we're really proud of."

Building an Even Stronger Future

After a tumultuous period, Sevananda is slowly but surely regaining its financial footing. "We're definitely trending in the right direction," says McMorris. "It's been a tough few years, but we're on track to be fully recovered in the next couple of quarters. We've had amazing support from the community, and that's helped us get to where we are today."

Roland is optimistic about the future but acknowledges the importance of ongoing strategic planning. "Sevananda has always been a beloved institution in Atlanta, but we can't rely on nostalgia alone. We need to stay competitive and continually improve. There's a lot of competition in the grocery industry now, and we need to make sure we're not just relying on our past reputation."

Part of this ongoing improvement involves addressing Sevananda's visibility and accessibility. Despite its strong community presence, the store faces challenges related to parking and location visibility. Recently, Sevananda received an improvement grant from Invest Atlanta, an economic development agency in Atlanta, that will help address such issues. "We've been awarded a \$50,000 grant to help with some much-needed improvements, which is a big step forward," Roland says.

However, it's Sevananda's commitment to customer service and personalized care that continues to set it apart. "Co-ops are all about people," McMorris emphasizes. "We're here to meet the needs of our community, not to prioritize profits over people. It's not always easy, but that's our core value, and we're sticking to it."

As Sevananda celebrates its 50th anniversary, the co-op remains a vital part of Atlanta's community-centered food system. The next 50 years will surely bring new challenges, but with a steadfast commitment to sustainability, wellness and community, Sevananda is well-positioned to continue thriving and serving its loyal customer base for generations to come.



Rick Baldwin is an artist, writer and podcaster from Knoxville, currently residing outside of east Atlanta. He occasionally facilitates meditation sessions for creatives and blogs about topics of practical spirituality. Find him on Facebook @ rekcreations.

Serving up Happiness

Foods for Better Moods

by Zak Logan



RossHelen/CanvaPro

Most of us feel a little grumpy when we're hungry, but a diet that is dominated by ultra-processed packaged foods and drive-through meals increases our chances of experiencing chronic mood swings and symptoms of depression. Ultra-processed foods are characterized by a long list of additives—artificial flavors, colors, sweeteners, preservatives, salt and more—resulting in products that do not resemble their original natural state.

In a 2022 study published in *JAMA Network Open* involving more than 10,000 participants aged 18 or older, individuals with a higher percentage of their total energy intake from ultra-processed foods were significantly more likely to report mild depression and more mentally unhealthy and anxious days. Research involving more than 31,000 middle-aged women

published last year in *JAMA Network Open* linked a higher consumption of ultra-processed foods, especially artificial sweeteners, to a higher risk of depressive disorders. Reducing ultra-processed food intake by at least three servings per day lowered the risk of depression.

In order to produce serotonin, dopamine and other neurotransmitters that are crucial for balanced mental health, our bodies require vitamins, minerals and other nutrients found in real, whole foods. The Mayo Clinic recommends avoiding processed meats, sugary beverages, sweets and refined grains, and it gives a thumbs-up to feel-good fare on the Mediterranean diet that includes plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds and whole grains; healthy fats like olive oil; lean meats, including fish and poultry; and some dairy, such as natural cheese and yogurt.

Brain Changers

According to Holly DeLong, a registered dietitian and the founder of Food & Mood, in Malvern, Pennsylvania, “Food is a form of medicine, and we truly can make big improvements in our mental and emotional well-being using the intersection between nutrition and mental health. Food, gut health and nutrient status all affect neurotransmitter production and balance. Certain nutrients are required to produce neurotransmitters.” She recommends the consumption of mood-friendly, B-vitamin-rich leafy greens, avocados, lentils, sunflower seeds and nutritional yeast, as well as magnesium-packed whole grains, tofu and bananas.

“What we eat influences key systems in our body, especially blood sugar, gut health and inflammation, and these impact mood, energy, stress and anxiety,” says Amy Fox, a certified functional food coach and life coach in Cincinnati, Ohio. “Think of each meal as your ‘nutrition prescription.’ These choices almost always predict how you’ll feel in a few hours. A helpful rule of thumb is to aim for foods with five ingredients or less and limit boxed, bagged or wrapped items.” She also notes that high-sugar items, especially before bed, are the worst offenders.

What we eat, and when, can improve the body’s chemical balancing act. “Meal timing can be a huge factor in how food affects mood. Skipping meals and eating too close to bedtime can contribute to poor energy, lower moods and higher anxiety for some people,” explains DeLong.

Fox notes that consuming alcohol can also backfire. “Sometimes we think a glass of wine will help us unwind after a long day, but it has the opposite effect. Even small amounts of alcohol can disrupt the production of our natural happiness chemicals.”

Gut Health

Because 95 percent of serotonin is produced in the gut, nutritionally dense foods and those containing probiotics and prebiotics promote the presence of good bacteria in the belly, which ensures the production of this neurotransmitter. Fox recommends three daily servings of fermented foods like kefir, kombucha, kimchi, plain Greek yogurt and naturally fermented sauerkraut found in the refrigerated section with “live cultures” on the label.

DeLong’s favorite go-to allies are sources of omega-3 fatty acids like salmon, walnuts and chia seeds to combat inflammation, an integral factor in fighting the blues. She praises the antioxidant potential of berries, acai and pomegranates, and suggests swapping coffee for L-theanine-rich matcha green tea to decrease systemic patterns of anxiety.

Protein Power

Protein is an unsung hero in eating to feel better. “A craving for sweets might indicate a serotonin deficiency often linked to stress and low energy,” says Fox. “When you eat protein-rich foods, they help slow digestion, keeping blood sugar levels stable and providing a longer-lasting energy source.” She recommends lean chicken, beef, eggs, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese and legumes.

Consistent Change

According to DeLong, “Neurotransmitter health is not a predetermined, unchangeable defect as it is often seen. We can make an impact with the choices we make.”

Simple, consistent changes in the diet can produce lasting effects. “It’s about small, supportive choices that build up over time, shifting focus from restriction to nourishment,” says Fox. 🍌

Zak Logan is a freelance health writer dedicated to getting back to basics.

GUT-FRIENDLY BROCCOLI NUT SOUP

YIELD: 3 SERVINGS

- 1 yellow onion, roughly chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
- 2 celery stalks, roughly chopped
- ¾ tsp dried thyme
- 5 cups bone broth
- 1 cup raw cashews
- 1½ lbs Yukon gold or white potatoes, diced (approx. 3½ cups)
- 7 cups broccoli florets (approx. 1 large head of broccoli)
- ½ tsp sea salt or to taste
- ½ tsp black pepper or to taste



VeselovaElena from Getty Images/CanvaPro

Add onion, garlic, celery and 2 to 3 tablespoons of water to a pot. Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until softened, adding more water as needed to prevent sticking. Add the thyme and sauté another 30 seconds until fragrant.

Add broth, cashews, potatoes, broccoli florets, salt and pepper to the pot and bring to a boil over high heat. Once boiling, lower the heat to medium and cook for approximately 6 to 8 minutes until the potatoes are fork tender.

Use an immersion blender to puree the soup in the pot or carefully transfer the contents of the pot to a stand blender in batches and puree.

Serve with crusty bread or garnish with croutons.

SUSTAINING GRAIN BOWL

YIELD: 1 TO 3 SERVINGS

- 1 cup whole grain of choice, cooked (millet; wild, brown or black rice; buckwheat; quinoa; farro; or amaranth)

- 1 to 3 cups vegetables, raw, lightly steamed, roasted or sautéed

- 4 to 6 oz of lean protein of choice, cooked (lean meat, egg, beans, legumes, tempeh, tofu or fish)

- ½ cup nuts, seeds, sprouts or avocado


Cook grain, vegetables and protein, depending on choice of ingredients. To build, layer grain as the base and add vegetables, protein and toppings.

Recipes courtesy of Holly DeLong.



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Promoting Fertility Naturally

Tips for Couples Trying to Conceive

by Madiha Saeed, M.D.



atlasstudio/CanvaPro

The prospect of parenthood can bring a range of emotions to couples trying to conceive—from excitement and jubilation to worry, frustration and sadness. According to the World Health Organization, one in six people

worldwide experience infertility in their lifetime. Many couples hoping to conceive turn to costly medications and painful procedures designed to manipulate hormones, help with ovulation issues and prepare a woman's body for pregnancy.

In addition to researching such medications and procedures, couples should explore natural alternatives that nurture and support their ability to conceive. "Fertility is not just about hormones," says Nashat Latib, a certified functional medicine doctor specializing in natural fertility. "Consider what is going on in your whole body."

"Males and females are equally at the root of fertility struggles, and sometimes the roadblocks can come from both sides," observes Aumatma Simmons, a naturopathic doctor, endocrinologist and author of *Fertility Secrets: What Your Doctor Didn't Tell You About Baby-Making*. "It is essential to pinpoint the root causes of fertility problems."

For women, fertility rates naturally decline with age, from a 25 to 30 percent chance of pregnancy in their early-to-mid-20s to about a 5 percent chance by age 40. Other health concerns such as ovulation issues, endometriosis, uterine fibroids and polycystic ovary syndrome can complicate conception and the ability to carry a baby to term.

When fertility issues arise, often the focus is placed on women, but about half of the cases can be attributed to the men. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that 12.8 percent of men aged 25 to 49 experience infertility, and the rate is rising. Factors like low sperm production, poor sperm quality, oxidative stress, blockages preventing sperm release, undescended testicles and cancers contribute to male infertility. Other health problems,

including diabetes, infections, hormone imbalances, autoimmunity and tumors, can impact both men and women.

Rainbow Nutrition

Diet plays a significant role in overall reproductive health. Simmons stresses the need for a diet that includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, healthy fats and whole grains to provide the essential nutrients that support fertility. Phytonutrients—natural compounds in plants that provide health benefits—optimize male and female fertility and help the body eliminate toxins. Simmons also recommends limiting processed foods and refined sugar, which can negatively impact hormone balance.

"Nutrients found in cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, bok choy and kohlrabi can help regulate and metabolize hormones," says Latib. "Nutrients found in grapes and berries can improve the quality of the eggs and sperm by reducing oxidative stress; protect reproductive cells from damage; support successful embryo implantation; regulate ovulation by modulating hormone levels; and promote hormonal balance. Compounds like lycopene in tomatoes and watermelon have been shown to improve sperm motility and boost immune function by providing antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds."

Latib adds that pairing foods from different color categories in meals helps maximize the positive effects of phytonutrients. Examples include a berry smoothie with

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spinach, a stir-fry dish with a rainbow of vegetables, a tomato and mushroom frittata, a cauliflower rice bowl with turmeric and veggies, and a kale salad topped with sweet potato.

A Clean Lifestyle

Toxins are all around us, and hormone-disrupting chemicals found in cosmetics, plastic packaging, toys, carpets and pesticides can have serious consequences for male and female fertility. Latib suggests using glass instead of plastic whenever possible and eating organic fruits and vegetables to reduce the pesticide and herbicide exposure.

“Be cautious of endocrine disruptors such as bisphenol A, commonly known as BPA, and phthalates that are used to make plastics. They are found in food packaging, water bottles and food-can linings,” says Simmons, adding, “Even ingredients like ‘fragrance’ can contribute to hormonal imbalances and gut-health issues.”

Stress can negatively affect fertility, underscoring the need for stress management. Simmons recommends quitting tobacco use, reducing alcohol intake and practicing yoga or meditation to improve overall reproductive health. Exercise can also reduce tension, improving health and fertility.

Latib recommends high-intensity exercise during the first half of a woman’s menstrual cycle and restorative movement and exercise

in the second half of the cycle. For men, she notes the importance of supporting testosterone levels with regular exercise and sufficient sleep, limiting unhealthy environmental exposures and consuming adequate levels of nutrients like zinc and vitamin D.

Reducing Inflammation

Chronic inflammation can negatively impact fertility by disrupting hormone balance and damaging reproductive tissues. Oxidative stress occurs when the body’s free radicals and antioxidants are not balanced, leading to damaged reproductive cells and fertility issues.

Both Latib and Simmons recommend working with a fertility specialist to assess a couple’s health, fertility and lifestyle factors. The assessment should include hormone testing to measure levels of testosterone, luteinizing hormones, follicle-stimulating hormones and prolactin; nutrient testing for zinc, selenium and antioxidant levels; a gut-health assessment; and a thorough evaluation of environmental toxin exposures.

“Your body is smart,” emphasizes Latib. “Nothing is unexplainable. If you are having trouble conceiving, there is a root cause. A functional fertility practitioner can guide you through the process.”

Madiha Saeed is a holistic, functional and integrative doctor in Naperville, Illinois, and director of education for Documenting Hope and KnoWEwell.

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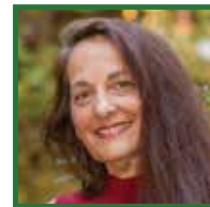
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First Thoughts and New Experiences

Returning to Innocence Through Beginner's Mindset

by Carrie Jackson



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The new year brings a fresh focus on growth and forward thinking. An intentional way to harness this is to adopt the Zen Buddhist idea of *shoshin*, or beginner's mind. This approach guides people to experience life with curiosity and openness, helping them let go of old patterns. It is a way of being that encourages practitioners to abandon preconceptions, embrace the world with a sense of wonder and see things from a more optimistic perspective. By examining and releasing old ways of thinking, expressing

gratitude and incorporating different practices, the mind, body and heart open to novel opportunities.

The Beginner's Mindset

"The idea of being open to the situation comes up repeatedly in meditative traditions," says Steve Rogne, owner and director of Zen Shiatsu, in Evanston, Illinois. He notes that in his practice, *shoshin* is an essential part of *shiatsu*, a form of massage therapy that uses gentle pressure to stimulate the body's acupressure points

and meridian channels. *Shoshin* can aid in unblocking stagnant energy and harmonizing the flow of *qi*, or vital energy, in the body.

"As a situation arises, we have our natural responses, which may include wanting to change what is happening. Another perspective is to ask, 'What if I accept things the way they are?'" Rogne explains. "Accepting situations for the way they are is the foundation from which we can respond. It's like a preparation for action without being the endpoint. We can simultaneously be open and respond mindfully."

Learning to accept what is happening can also help us break old patterns of thinking and reacting. "There is a very common human dynamic to move toward the things we want and away from the things we don't want; however, this can lead to a fixed response pattern that limits our growth," says Rogne. "In *shiatsu*, we help people to recognize those patterns and find the balance between active response and trusting with faith. This trains us to listen to our inner wisdom and relax into outcomes that aren't what we prefer."

Mindfully changing patterns can open us up to new experiences that we had previously shut out. "You may find a willingness to move forward in new relationships, even though you've experienced that relationships can be painful, or perhaps you find the willingness to speak up even though there's a chance you won't be heard in the way that you want," Rogne notes.

Keeping a receptive mind helps to open us up physically, as well. "In both *shiatsu* and the *shoshin* mindset, we trust that every person's body is already working on its own healing. When we let go of our fixed holding patterns, the internal circulation is freed up, leaving the best possible opportunity for the body to regain all the healthy rhythms of the organs and reduce conditions such as chronic pain," Rogne asserts.

Optimism

Having hope and confidence about the future is essential in cultivating a beginner's mind, helping to counter some of the fear and intolerance that can undermine our lives. "A *shoshin* principle is that there is not anything fundamentally wrong with us or with the world. This allows us to move forward with positive faith and engagement," says Rogne.

"Optimism is a belief that good things will happen and that things will work out in the end," says Victor Perton, founder of the Centre for Optimism, an Australian-based think tank dedicated to fostering realistic and infectious optimism around the world. "With optimism, we enter each experience expecting fresh possibilities, guided by a sense that there's something meaningful to discover."

This positive outlook has myriad benefits. "Optimism nurtures healthy longevity and acts as a powerful protector against major health threats like heart disease, cancer and dementia," says Perton. "Optimism also lowers the risk of cognitive decline, as optimistic people tend to be more socially and physically active, helping stave off dementia and age-related memory loss." A 2022 study of more than 150,000 racially diverse, older women published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* found that the most optimistic women were healthier, lived 4.4 years longer than the least optimistic women and were more likely to live past age 90.

A positive outlook can help navigate the stress and anxiety of life. "Optimism doesn't mean ignoring the challenge; it means approaching it with the belief that solutions are possible. Optimism and a beginner's mind work together in this way, helping us to stay open to new paths, resilient in the face of setbacks and appreciative of life's small, beautiful details," opines Perton.

Incorporating small, intentional practices into our day can help us cultivate optimism. "Smiling with genuine warmth—even at

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strangers—can shift our outlook, and asking others, ‘What’s the best thing in your day?’ brings a positive energy to conversations,” says Perton. He also recommends simple grounding practices like gardening, yoga and meditation to nurture curiosity and positivity, noting, “Through these small habits, optimism becomes a daily practice and, in time, a personal superpower for resilience and joy.”



Reframing Our Outlook
 Reflective practices encourage us to explore our goals with a fresh outlook. “Journaling is a practice that is just for you, and you’re not intending to share it with anyone else,” explains Shawn Brown, a Baltimore-based wellness facilitator and yoga teacher who helps clients find a path to being their authentic selves. “It really allows you to examine what is popping up and what you are curious about. This might be learning a new language or starting a new yoga practice. When we look at things as a beginner, we are open to what we are truly interested in.”

A regular gratitude practice also helps bring us back to a place of grounding. “When we tap into gratitude, it expands our propensity to be creative and allows us to drop into the present moment. This is where we live, but when we think of the future or ruminate on something that happened in the past, we are pulled out,” says Brown. She encourages clients to take breaks throughout the day and recall a person, place or experience for which they are grateful. “Think about something that makes the corner of your mouth turn into a smile,” she suggests. “It can be as simple as gratitude for your partner who bought dog food or a neighbor who moved a package off the porch. This brings us back into our lives right now, and that’s where the beginner is.”

Cultivating a sense of play can also tap into a shoshin mindset. “As adults, there’s a need to have a goal or expected result in any situation. When you’re a beginner, you don’t have a specific outcome because you’re just learning. Play, especially with kids or an animal, is free-form

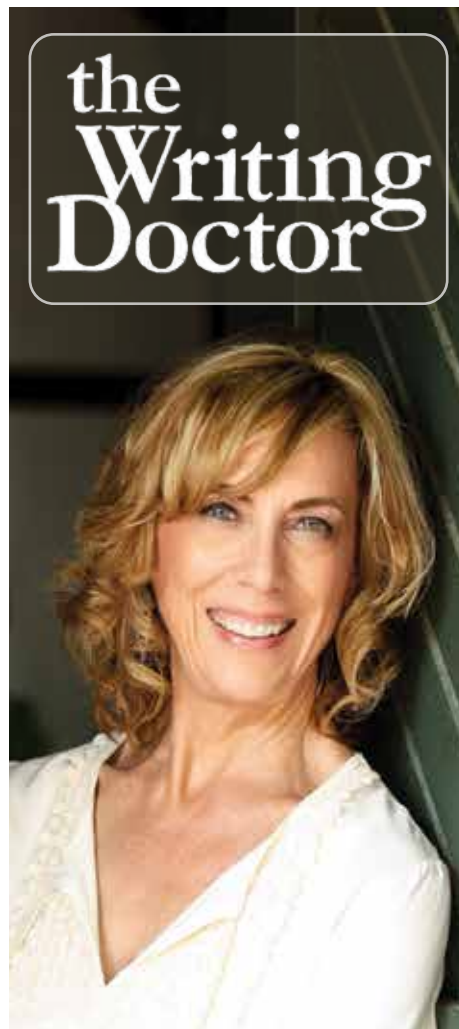
engagement without the need to get it right or check something off our to-do list. Releasing the need for control and perfection opens us up and expands us for so many other options and possibilities,” Brown says.

Brown encourages her yoga students to be open in the way they approach their practice. “Coming into a pose in a different way can give us a new experience of it,” she says. “My approach to yoga is not that we’re trying to do the posture, it’s that we’re trying to feel the posture. It’s a mirror of our being and can indicate if you are feeling strong, tired, energized or wobbly. Rather than attaching a label of good or bad, you just notice, and that opens us up.”

Especially in the new year, Brown urges clients to replace “I have to” with “I get to,” which presents more of a growth mindset. “This is the time to reframe our goals,” she points out. “Trying something new, like taking a West African dance class instead of your regular spin class, shakes up the routine and keeps your mind and body learning. You get to be pushed out of the comfort zone, and that’s where the magic happens.”

Carrie Jackson is a Chicago-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to Natural Awakenings. Connect at CarrieJacksonWrites.com.

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Turning Workouts Into Playtime

by David J. Sautter, NASM (CPT, FNS, PES), ACE (SCS)



Elena Photo/CanvaPro

When it comes to exercise, many people think of rigid routines, grueling workouts and strict schedules, but joyful movement can make fitness fun, flexible and something to look forward to. It could be as simple as walking through the park, dancing in the living room or playing outside with the kids. Unlike traditional exercise routines that feel like obligations or chores, a joyful approach to fitness focuses on engaging in activities that feel good both physically and mentally.

“Movement does not have to be intense or complex; however, it must be intentional and innate,” says Katia Mashni, a health-and-wellness coach and registered dietitian/nutritionist in Michigan. “When you find and engage in an exercise program you enjoy, you are far more likely to stick to it and adopt it as part of your lifestyle because it makes you happy.” A 2020 study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* of more than 2,300 adults found that those engaged in moderate and high levels of activity had significantly higher life satisfaction and happiness than those with low activity levels.

Fun Fuels Fitness Success

Fun is a powerful motivator when it comes to fitness. A 2020 review of more than 2,800 studies and papers by researchers at Victoria University, in Australia, found that when people had fun exercising, they were significantly more likely to consistently exercise.

By regularly engaging in our favorite activities, we can create a healthier relationship with fitness. A study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* of more than 200 participants involved in different levels of activity found that after four weeks, active participants had higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction and self-esteem.

Adding Joy to Workouts

- **Listen to music.** An energizing playlist of favorites is a surefire way to boost a walking, running or strength-training routine.
- **Exercise with friends or family.** Increase the fun quotient by turning a gym workout or outdoor hike into a social event.
- **Try something new or revisit a childhood favorite.** Explore activities such as biking around the neighborhood, hula-hooping in the backyard or swimming at a local pool or beach. “I encourage people to get curious,” says Courtney Pelitera, a dietitian with a passion for sport and performance nutrition. “Maybe you loved swimming in high school, or you have always wanted to take your dog out on a hike, or the pickleball leagues popping up everywhere sound like fun to you. Try it out! We all start somewhere, and being new to something might even bring you into friendships with others who are also new.”
- **Dance around the house.** Turn household chores into a dance party by moving to the rhythm while cleaning or cooking.

- **Play with pets.** Get active by running, walking or playing fetch with the dog or by creating a fun obstacle course to do together.

Releasing the Guilt and Pressure

Many people feel judged or intimidated when it comes to fitness. Embrace these strategies to break free from the pressure to exercise perfectly or to follow an intense workout routine.

- **Let go of perfection.** Focus on progress, not perfection. Every bit of movement counts, and it's okay if goals or milestones are not achieved right away.
- **Set a realistic pace.** Whether starting or returning to fitness, it is important to honestly evaluate exercise readiness. Joyful movement is about doing what feels right for the body.

- **Avoid comparisons to others.** Everyone's fitness journey is different, and trying to match others can take the joy out of it. Celebrate personal achievements, no matter how small.
- **Focus on fun, not performance.** Place less emphasis on the quality of the exercise movements and more on how pleasing those efforts are.
- **Choose comfortable environments.** Whether a solo walk in nature, a quiet yoga session or dancing at home, choose settings that feel relaxing and happy.
- **Dress for comfort.** Wearing feel-good workout clothes adds confidence and reduces self-conscious discomfort during exercise. 🦋

David J. Sautter is a certified trainer, nutrition specialist, and health and fitness writer.

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Where Intention and Purpose Meet: *Sankalpa*

by Patricia Schmidt



Elina Fairytale/Pexels.com

January 2025 is upon us, and it's all about intentions and resolutions. Who among us hasn't said to themselves: "In this coming year, I will lose weight and get in shape!" or "I will work harder at my job and earn more money!" or "I will drink less, speak to my neighbors and family more, and get off my phone!"? Sound familiar?

However, if we look closely, most New Year's resolutions have an inherent liability within them—they start from a place of lack, insisting that we must *do* better, *be* better or *look* better. They typically imply that something about ourselves must change, and as a result, they imbue a subtle sense of guilt or shame for who we are.

And since it is usually framed as something to succeed at, we might feel even more guilt and shame if or when we fail.

But what if you're already whole and enough?

The yogic philosophy takes us out of this essential framework, removing us from the realm of guilt and shame and the paradigm of success or failure. Yoga's proposal and fervent promise is that we are already whole and enough. We just have to *remember* that we are.

Yoga provides a long list of concrete tools and strategies to help us along the path of remembering the Self, including medita-

tion, contemplating inspiring people and lengthening the exhalation of the breath, for example. Additionally, remembering who we are can involve a form of intention-setting or resolution-making that is quite different from the everyday New Year's resolution. In Sanskrit, it is *sankalpa*.

Deepest Intention + Personal Purpose

"San" is a Sanskrit root with nuanced meaning and application. It often refers to acting in accordance with and can mean the opposite of "against."

Kalpa is another nuanced Sanskrit term, referring to a significant length of (cosmic) time with a spatial dimension; it is also an aspect of rightness in action and thought or contemplation. The two come together in "sankalpa" to refer to an encompassing sentiment that's in full accordance with divine time. In practice, students think of their heart's deepest intention aligned with personal purpose.

Practicing *sankalpa* is usually part of a longer yoga practice, such as restorative yoga or yoga nidra. [See our articles on *restorative yoga and yoga nidra* here: bit.ly/restorative-0824, bit.ly/nidra-1124—Ed.]

It is a present-tense statement of one's heart's deepest longing or desire, and it is expressed in the present tense because it is understood to already be true. It is also a fervent expression of one's pure Self and/or purpose. The latter might be obscured from our awareness, but the yogic lesson is that they are already there and waiting for us to know. *We are already whole and enough.* To come home to ourselves is our yogic work; our innate ability to do so is yoga's promise.

To illuminate the key differences between a classic New Year's resolution and a yogic *sankalpa*, consider how differently a desire around diet and exercise might be approached. A New Year's resolution

might be: "I will exercise more. I will eat according to my new diet." The person might hope for a change in appearance, an increase in self-satisfaction and a greater sense of being worthy of love due to that change in appearance.

With a very different approach, a *sankalpa* on the topic might be: "I take care of myself," and the possible outcomes might include greater self-love, more enjoyment of one's actual physical capacities and an increase in mindful eating practices.

It Only Works If You Do It

One of the uncomfortable truths about yoga is that it only works if you do it. It's important to remember that *sankalpa* is an active practice and a skill we hone. It involves what is often referred to as *kriya yoga* practices—the combination of which underpins all other yogic work—dedicated effort, meditation upon the self and surrender.

As you begin to work with *sankalpa*, keep these things in mind:

Reflect. *Sankalpa* involves intentional consideration. In order to act in accordance with your true light, reflect upon it. The active thinking aspect of *sankalpa* expresses dedicated effort and intentional meditation upon the self.

Do. *Sankalpa* involves intentional beginning. The poet David Whyte writes, "What is important is simply to begin," but he counsels readers to be aware of "subtle methods of delay." Beginning is hard. Each time we state a *sankalpa*, we initiate a relationship with our Self.

Believe. *Sankalpa* also involves intentional surrender. It is human to fall into self-doubt and uncertainty. Offering a surrendered acknowledgment of the value of the yoga path and trusting in a purpose we can't see or feel are sometimes the hardest actions of all.

Practicing Sankalpa

First, take a comfortable position. Many bodies will find themselves most at ease in a propped and supported reclined position on the earth or in a bed, or a propped/supported seated position, such as up against a wall if seated on the ground, or at a slight incline in a chair or sofa position.

Expect to stay in this position for eight to ten minutes.

As you settle in to ease, allow the tongue to widen in the mouth and to come away from the teeth. Allow the cheekbones to grow a little heavier. Soften around the temple space and the jaw joint where it meets the skull. Invite the eyes to ease in their sockets and the brow space to smooth.

Observe the breath print just as it is. Notice the shape of the inhalation. Notice its place in the body. Where is it? In the chest? The shoulders? Then, notice where it isn't. Nothing needs to change; just observe the inhalation and its qualities and place.

Notice the exhalation, its shape and its place. Nothing needs to change; simply observe.

Allow awareness to consider the natural pause at the top of the inhalation and at the bottom of the exhalation. Stay with the breath print. Nothing needs to change. Observe the breath print and bring awareness to the breath. Anchor the mind to the breath with as much ease as possible.

Begin to connect your observational self with your heart's deepest longing. Allow whatever arises to arise. Notice this longing as an affirmative statement of your own self-being that is already true. Sense and feel the clarity of your *sankalpa* as an alighting. A coming home.

Allow the body-mind to rest in your *sankalpa*, to be at ease. You might repeat your *sankalpa* several times. With each repetition, consider fostering a slightly longer exhalation, resting in the pause at the bottom of the exhalation.

An image of clarity, such as a reflective mirror, a shining or multifaceted light or a clear and open-aired resonant space, might also arise for you. Allow the truth of your *sankalpa* to permeate or emanate from this image.

Continue to take deep rest. Abide in the clarity of your *sankalpa* and notice yourself receiving the promise and bounty of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* 1.3, which might be paraphrased as "When the student stills the turning of the mind, she will rest in her true Self." Notice and welcome yourself receiving this promise, however fleeting. Notice the felt sense of this deep rest and abiding in your true self.

To close the practice, deepen the breath. Allow an intentional breath to enter the body. Notice the mind watching the body and then something else entirely watching the thinking mind. From your true self, begin to awaken awareness of your surroundings and take a few additional deep breaths. Begin to welcome movement to your limbs, rolling through wrists and ankles, awakening the flesh of the body. Open your eyes. Notice the end of your practice, and quietly begin to return to your day. 🧘



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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CALENDAR

MONDAY, JANUARY 6

Movement and Meditation Monday Yoga Class – 7-8:30pm. Beginner-friendly yoga combining movement and mindfulness. \$15 in person; \$10 virtual. Chosewood Studio, 1099 Boulevard SE, Atlanta. Reserve: bit.ly/meditation-yoga-monday-010625.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8

Free Yoga Classes – 3-4pm. Join Mary Veal for a relaxing session suitable for all levels. Wear comfortable clothes and bring a mat or towel. Free. Roswell Library, Roswell. Details: bit.ly/chair-and-matt-yoga-010825.

FRIDAY-SUNDAY, JANUARY 10-12

The Purpose & Power of Props – Times vary. Learn to enhance yoga practice and teaching with props for greater accessibility, injury support, and progression in poses. \$350 by 8/24; \$375 after. Vista Yoga. Details: bit.ly/vista-yoga-events.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11

Free! Zumba and Hip Hop Cardio Class – 10:15-11am. Dance and sweat to hip hop, Latin, and Afrobeat tunes. All fitness levels welcome. Free. Grant Park Recreation Center, 537 Park Ave SE, Atlanta. Details: bit.ly/zumba-hiphop-cardio-011125.

Free Reiki Infused Yoga & Meditation – 3:30-5:30pm. Experience Vinyasa yoga

and meditation infused with distant Reiki for chakra balancing. Free. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St NE, Suite A, Atlanta. Details: bit.ly/reikiinfusedyoga-011125.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12

Yin & Chow: Yoga and Brunch Series – 10:30am-1:30pm. Enjoy a meditative Yin yoga session followed by a pop-up chef brunch. \$25. Uptown Atlanta Test Kitchen, 2440 Piedmont Rd NE, Atlanta. Details: bit.ly/YinChow-YogaBrunchSeries-011225.

Mala Making Workshop – 11am-4pm. Create a hand-tied 108-bead mala while exploring mantras and meditation techniques. Includes materials, chanting, and fruit snacks. \$148. Aum Studio for Wellness. Details and registration: bit.ly/aum-studio-events.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 16

Yoga in the Galleries – 6-7pm. Practice yoga surrounded by art with instructors from Five Points Yoga. Free, sanitized mats provided. Space limited; tickets available at 5:15pm. Georgia Museum of Art, 90 Carlton St, Athens. Details: bit.ly/yoga-galleries-011625.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18

Free Heartfulness Meditation Sessions – 5-5:30pm. Discover inner peace and serenity with guided meditation. Chairs provided; bring a mat or cushion if pre-

ferred. Free. Ambaji USA - Shree Shakti Mandir, 1450 Huie Rd, Lake City. Details: bit.ly/HeartfulnessMeditation-ShreeShaktiMandir-011825.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19

Free Yoga Flow at Eastern Wharf – 10:30-11:30am. Enjoy a mindful vinyasa flow in The Park, hosted by Otium Movement Studios. Stay after for brunch at Bar Julian with 25% off. Free. The Park at Eastern Wharf, Savannah. Register: otiumstudios.com/savannahschedule

Athens Yoga Collective Yoga Class – 12-1pm. Enjoy a free pop-up yoga class led by Athens Yoga Collective. Held on the patio, it's perfect for all levels. Free. First and third Sundays monthly. Details: bit.ly/collectiveyoga-class-011925.

Yoga at the Lake Claire Community Land Trust – 12-1pm. Experience a liberating yoga session with @unveilbyvada, blending diverse movements for inner freedom. \$10. Lake Claire Community Land Trust, 270 Arizona Ave NE, Atlanta. Details: bit.ly/yoga-lakeclaire-011925.

Breathwork for Massive Transformation – 5-6pm. Explore transformative breathwork to release traumas, clarify limiting beliefs, and gain mindfulness. \$45. Aum Studio for Wellness. Details and registration: bit.ly/aum-studio-events.

MONDAY, JANUARY 20

Bend & Brew – Yoga on the Beltline – 6:15-7:30pm. Energizing yoga class blending flows, cardio, and sculpting movements. All levels welcome. From \$8.88. Enjoy post-class beer and food specials. Brew-dog Atlanta, 112 Krog St NE. Details: bit.ly/yogaonthebeltline-012025.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25

Inner Peace Meditative Art Class – 11am-4pm. Explore meditative techniques to create art that embodies tranquility and fosters emotional balance. \$111. Aum Studio for Wellness. Details and registration: bit.ly/aum-studio-events

Adolescent Yoga – 12-1pm. Monthly yoga for kids and teens to manage anxiety, build self-esteem, and enhance focus. Free. Center for Intuitive Healing, 1842 Independence Square, Suite D, Dunwoody. Details: bit.ly/adolescent-yoga-012525.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 26

Sound Bath & Restorative Yoga – 1-3pm. Enjoy deep relaxation with restorative yoga, Reiki, and a meditative sound bath. Mats and props provided. \$25. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St NE, Suite A, Atlanta. Details: bit.ly/SoundBath-RestorativeYoga-012625.

JANUARY 31 – MAY 11

YTT Collective 200-hr Teacher Training Program – YTT Collective pools studios across north Atlanta to craft a 200-hour Yoga Teacher Training program. We empower students to delve deep into practice and teaching methods, fostering a supportive community for growth. More info: www.yttcollective.com, kimuplift@gmail.com.

MARCH 22 - JULY 13

200-Hour Yoga Teacher Training – Times vary. Dive into asana, pranayama, anatomy, and philosophy while gaining confidence as a yoga teacher. \$2,950 upfront or \$3,050 payment plan. Peachtree Yoga Center, Sandy Springs. Details: bit.ly/pyc-200-ytt.

MARCH 28 – SEPTEMBER 28

Vista Yoga 200-hr Teacher Training Program – Our foundational training, a journey of discovery and insight, is comprised of a small, intimate group of students. Instructors: Marti and Marty Yura, Patricia Schmidt, Fabiana Pimenta. More information: vistayoga.com/yoga-teacher-training/, info@vistayoga.com, 404-929-9642.

APRIL 27 – DECEMBER 13

Giving Tree Yoga 300-hr Teacher Training Program – This will forever change your life! Nourish your mind, body and spirit and dive deep into the heart of the practice and philosophy of yoga. Led by studio owner Karina Carmichael, karina@givingtreeyogasmyrna.com. bit.ly/giving-tree-300-ytt-2025

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Healthy Kids



Secrets to a Joyful Childhood

Building a Family That Laughs and Loves Together

by Christina Connors



including sadness, anger and frustration. To me, creating a joyful home means that, as a family, we practice accepting and holding all of our emotions through joyful play, deep connection and creativity."

"Everything starts in the home, and our kids take their cues from their parents and caregivers," says Harmony Longenecker, founder of The Classical Academy of Sarasota, in Florida, a private pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade classical liberal arts school. "It is important to model for our kids how to be grateful, generous and joyful, and doing things together as a family fosters those qualities."

A systematic review of research published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* suggests that positive family dynamics like cohesion and communication strongly predict the happiness of children and adolescents. Here are some ways to incorporate joy in the home to benefit the whole family.

Reduce smartphone use. Children thrive whenever their parents and other family members are fully present in their lives. When spending time together, it is vital to remove distractions as a way of enabling and deepening the connection to one another. Eliminating or reducing smartphone use during family time is an important first step. To learn more, Longenecker recommends reading *The Opt-Out Family: How to Give Your Kids What Technology Can't*, by Erin Loechner.

Champion a gratitude jar. Encourage everyone to write down what they are thankful for on pieces of paper and drop them into a large jar. Once a week, invite each family member to pull out a gratitude note and share it with the group, encouraging discussion.

Have a family dance party. "Moving our bodies is a great way to release tension and boost serotonin," says Messinger. For added fun, stop the music every so often and have everyone freeze in place in outlandish positions that represent an emotion. Family members then take turns guessing what the emotions are. Is it

There are no sweeter sounds than the giggles of a child playing with a puppy or the giddy singing voice of a little one at bedtime. When these life-affirming moments are consistent and shared among a family, such heartfelt and abiding contentment can be considered a type of joy that becomes second nature, impacting children in enduring ways.

"Joy is the building block for developing resilience, improving mental health and supporting cognitive performance," says Dr. Chanie Messinger, a Brooklyn-based occupational therapist, educator and motivational speaker. "It's important to remember that our ability to experience joy is directly dependent upon our ability to be open to experiencing all the rainbow of emotions,

boredom, anger, glee, frustration or anticipation? This enjoyable game can improve the emotional intelligence of children.

Engage in a child's favorite activity. Plan an afternoon or day trip around a child's passions, which could be attending a car race for the auto enthusiast, painting outdoors for the child artist or having a family fashion show for the budding clothing designer. "Tapping into what our kids appreciate and noticing what lights them up is how we can create feelings of safety and joy," says Messinger.

Hold recurring family meetings. At the beginning of each season, sit down together and set family goals for the quarter, making sure to include both thoughtful intentions and fun activities. "Communication and setting intentions regularly as a family is not only a fun way to spend time together, but also opens up conversations about the power of setting intentions and following through," says Longenecker.

Get moving outdoors together. Go for a family bike ride. Take a walk in nature. Visit the zoo. Exercising in the sunshine or under a sparkling night sky is not only great for everyone's health, but also a fun way to bond and make special memories.

Keep a tidy household. A well-ordered home is a joyful one. Make chores fun by playing music while decorating, cooking, cleaning or doing laundry together.

Develop a family manifesto. Jointly write down a code of conduct and set of beliefs that identifies the family. "Getting clear on who we are as individuals and as a family helps our kids know their true selves. By helping them develop this inner knowing, it will help them navigate the world with confidence and be less likely to succumb to unhealthy peer pressure," says Longenecker.

Hit the reset button. "Oftentimes being crabby is a habit," says Longenecker. "Establish a rule: When a family member wakes up crabby, they must return to their room and take a few moments of alone-time to breathe and decide to shift their emotional state to a more positive one. If there are feelings that need to be seen and heard, be sure to help them express those emotions through conversation and cuddling."

Practice radical generosity. The act of giving is healthy for the soul. A beautiful way to practice generosity as a family is to serve together. Volunteer at a local charity, or pay for a stranger's meal at a restaurant. Such acts of kindness strengthen our empathy muscles and fill our spirits with joy. 🌱

Christina Connors is a writer, singer and creator of Christina's Cottage, a YouTube series to strengthen kids' resilience, connection and joy through music, mindful play and the power of the heart. Learn more at ChristinasCottage444.com.

Wise Words ———— 🌿 ————

Gladys McGarey

November 30, 1920 - September 28, 2024

on the Secrets to Health and Happiness at Every Age

by Rose Winters



Courtesy of The Foundation For Living Medicine/Michel VARD from Getty Images/CanvaPro

Recognized around the world as the mother of holistic medicine, Gladys McGarey was a physician and activist who inspired new ways of thinking about disease and health. Throughout her expansive career, she championed the integrated use of healing methods from Western, Eastern and Indigenous sources; advocated the use of food to prevent and treat disease; and promulgated the idea that illnesses offer glimpses into our inner selves.

McGarey practiced medicine for eight decades, was the co-founder and former president of the American Holistic Medical Association (now called the Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine) and co-founder of the Academy of Parapsychology and Medicine. She was one of the first medical doctors to use acupuncture in the United States.

In her book, *The Well-Lived Life: A 102-Year-Old Doctor's Six Secrets to Health and Happiness at Every Age*, McGarey offers both practical advice and inspiring wisdom drawn from her own life, as well as from the experiences of patients, family and friends. Here is a selection of excerpts from her book.

Secret I: You Are Here for a Reason

Each of us is here for a reason, to learn and grow and to give our gifts. When we are able to do so, we're filled with the creative life energy that I call the "juice." The juice is our reason for living. It's our fulfillment, our joy. It's what happens when life is activated by love. It's the energy we get from the things that matter and mean something to us.

Secret II: All Life Needs To Move

Consider life flowing like a forest stream. A tree falls across the stream, creating a small dam, and some sticks come along to build the dam up a little higher. Downstream of the dam, the water flow may slow significantly, but it usually doesn't stop completely. Even if it does, the water continues to flow upstream of the dam, and the movement can be seen in the rising waterline. At some point, the water reaches the top of the dam and a trickle forms on one side or another, going around the dam and continuing downstream.

Life reaches for life. Always. That means that when we feel the most stuck, whether physically, emotionally, situationally, or any other way, we may need only to look to where things are still moving. When we put our focus and our energy there, a

trickle will form around our dam. Aligning with this trickle will help us realign with life. When we do, we can get up and start moving again. Once that happens, all we need to do is keep going.

Secret III: Love Is the Most Powerful Medicine

Love dispels fear, but it is also blocked by fear. The two are often presented together because they're constantly in a push-pull game with each other. If fear is our habit, practicing love is a wise solution. And that practice will take us far, because love is infinitely stronger than fear—always. Just as our bodies are born to breathe air, we are born to love. That's why although it's good to address our fear, it's even better to focus on our love. Any effort we put toward love—truly, any effort at all—will self-perpetuate, bringing joy, health, and well-being into our lives.

Secret IV: You Are Never Truly Alone

There's a danger in thinking that we have to agree on everything to enjoy each other's company. This pushes everyone to extremes. It's natural that when someone's life looks like ours, it's easier to find common points of connection. But it's sometimes the people who are most unlike us who push us to see things in a new way. That means there's great meaning in interacting with people we don't like that much. When we approach people who think very differently from us with curiosity instead of condemnation, we grow.

Secret V: Everything Is Your Teacher

True optimism isn't toxic, because focusing on the positive does not mean denying the negative. It does not mean we dissociate from our pain, whether it's physical or emotional, or pretend that things are okay when they aren't. Instead, it means we look for what's wonderful anyway. We allow what hurts to hurt while continuing to search for the lesson in it and be grateful for the teaching.

Secret VI: Spend Your Energy Wildly

Love is always worth your energy. Always. Lean into what you love, whom you love, how you love. Love is an endless font of life force, and it's always there for you. 🌱

Excerpts are printed by permission of The Foundation for Living Medicine, created in 1989 by McGarey to bridge the gap between holistic and allopathic medicine through research and education. To learn more or to make a donation, visit FoundationForLivingMedicine.org.

Rose Winters is chief executive officer of The Foundation for Living Medicine and a consultant addressing nonprofit strategies with a special focus on women, health and children.



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Tell Me About Mom

by Tommy Housworth



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“Hey, Dad. Tell me about Mom.” Those were words I wish I’d spoken sooner. It was April 2021, and my mother passed away the July before, two days before my dad’s birthday. My older sister and I had been taking full-time shifts, caring for both of them since November 2019, when it became clear that they weren’t able to live independently any longer.

Of course, COVID came along shortly thereafter and added an extra layer of improbability to this new, tender process of caregiving for both parents simultaneously. My mom’s dementia made her understanding of all that was going on in the world, and for that matter, in her own house, quite hazy at times. Dad, though, was sharp as a tack, his body failing while his fertile mind consumed chapters of his beloved book collection each day.

This was the house I’d grown up in, so it was a bittersweet homecoming to again be sleeping on the sofa that I’d watched *M*A*S*H* and *The Carol Burnett Show* on as a kid, laughing along with my parents, who now had little cheer left to offer. Between the two of them being in at-home hospice and the pandemic, everything had a touch of surreality to it. One could, perhaps, be excused for not trusting one’s instincts in such situations.

When Mom passed, my instinct was to follow my dad’s lead. He spoke of regrets right up to her funeral service, which was confined

to a total of ten people in an outdoor setting instead of the larger church memorial they’d planned when the time came. There were a lot of tears in the days following her death. Then, nothing.

Dad did his best to do what children of The Great Depression often did, which was to put on a brave face and not let their kids see them struggling. As it was, he was shakily using a walker and often falling into diabetic comas from mismanagement of his insulin. It’s scary for parent and child alike when vulnerability becomes inevitability.

And so, because he was quite hard of hearing and not one to bring up uncomfortable subjects, I opted to let him steer the ship. If he wanted to talk about Mom, he’d say so, right? But deep inside, I knew better. He didn’t want to upset my sister and me. He didn’t want to bring pain to the surface when remaining stoic was already his default mode. But beneath that silence was a husband of 70+ years, mourning his love of a lifetime.

It took me months, sadly, to come around to the courage to offer him a chance to open up. One evening, as an Atlanta Braves game was about to begin on TV, I muted the sound and sat next to Dad. “Dad... Tell me about Mom,” I said. “What was life like before Susan and I came along?”

He seemed surprised, even stunned, but he’d wrestled with his grief enough by then to maintain composure as he unfolded a story about their early days of marriage, their first house and what being a newlywed was like in the era of Harry S. Truman and Frank Sinatra.

As Braves games were another family anchor and possibly my mom’s favorite pastime in her later years, those first games of the 2021 season became sparks for further conversations about Mom, even if only for a moment during commercial breaks. It felt as if an intangible weight had been lifted, and I was offering Dad—and myself—some oxygen.

Then, a new weight sank down as a couple of weeks later, Dad began his final decline, slipping into long stretches of sleep and finally easing into peace on May 3, 2021, ten months to the day that Mom transitioned.

Dad’s final life lesson for me was gentle yet mercurial. Allowing those who are grieving to tell their stories—to keep their loved one alive through words and memories—is perhaps the greatest comfort that can be offered. I’m grateful I found the courage to ask that simple yet so difficult question, even if it took months to summon it. I’m grateful to know more about Mom. 🙏



Tommy Housworth is a professional writer and creative director for corporate projects. He’s a certified mindfulness instructor, the author of two collections of short stories and he publishes on Substack.

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