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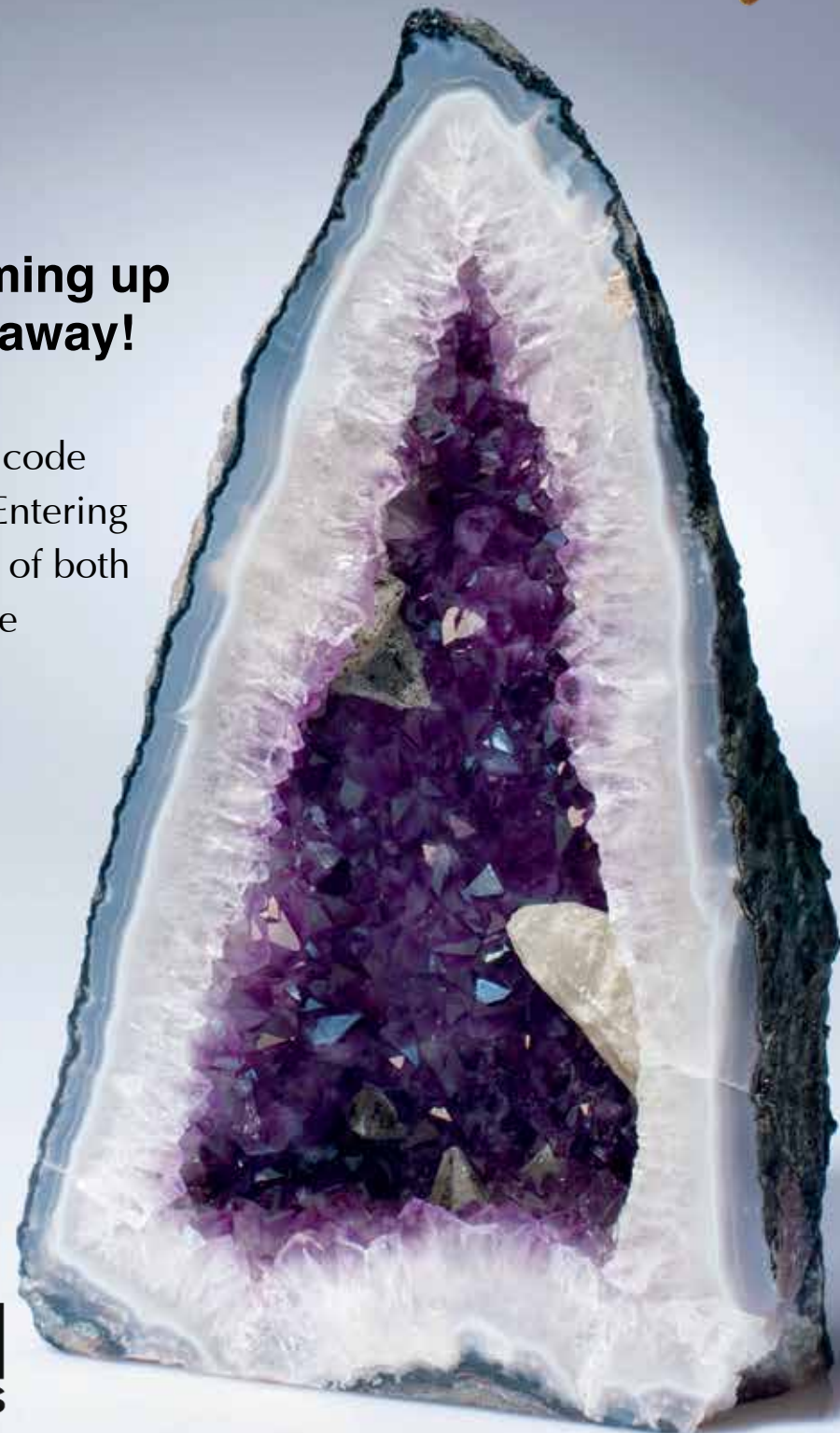
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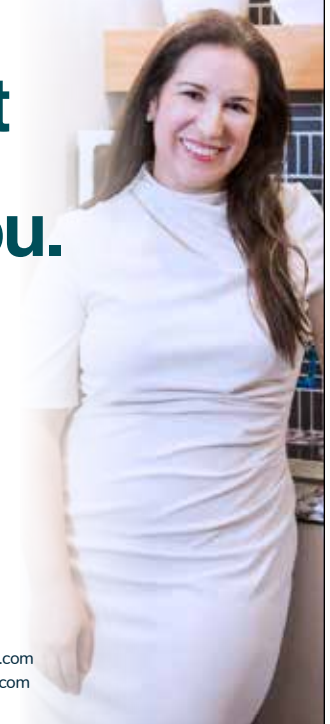


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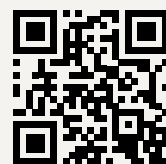
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ARCHIVE DIVE: HOLIDAY RECIPES

Every issue of *Natural Awakenings* contains recipes, but December may well be the month people are most in search of new ideas to prepare for family and friends. Most of the URLs link indirectly to recipes; they are the Conscious Eating features with links to that month's recipes at the end of the article. Enjoy!

The Gift of Yum

Homemade Treats Spark Holiday Cheer

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Correction: In a November news brief, the provided address for Cereset On Ponce was incorrect. The company's new location is 931 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Suite 205, in Atlanta.

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*If you light a lamp for somebody,
it will also brighten your path.*

—The Buddha

Denial is a powerful psychological mechanism. The likelihood of it arising or intensifying tends to increase with the intensity of some perceived threat. I suspect that's part of the reason so many deny the existence of climate change is that it is such an existential threat.

When I bought this magazine in 2017, I did not imagine I was going to be as vulnerable as I have been in these letters. When I reflect on the fact that I've been quite open about my shortcomings, I know the reason is twofold. First, I write about my concerns and struggles because, to a decent degree, directly and indirectly, they get translated into articles for the benefit of all. Also, I often approach this column, Letters from the Publisher (LFP), as my personal Walking Each Other Home (WEOH) column. WEOH, which is published in most issues, provides stories from our own community of personal "ah-ha moments," shifts in consciousness, or epiphanies that alter the course of the author's life.

I'm not sure there's an ah-ha moment here, but I feel this LFP is the hardest to write because I'm planning to share so much. For far too long, I have lived in denial about my current capacity to make this magazine acceptably profitable. Therefore, I'm asking for your help, dear reader, to support our efforts to deliver high-quality content on holistic health and personal evolution. This ask is painful, since it touches upon a sense of failure, shame and humiliation. Essentially, my upbringing and our common culture tell me that I should have been able to support myself without anyone's help.

I feel this way despite the fact that everything in reality shouts something quite to the contrary: Nobody really ever walks alone.

The times are a-changin'. For years, publications around the world have been asking readers for support to help them keep their publication free. *The Guardian*, a British daily newspaper, started its reader support program 11 years ago. The *Times-Picayune* started immediately after COVID appeared. And *ProPublica* has been donor-funded since its inception in 2008.

Plus, Atlanta's *Aquarius* magazine stopped publication many years ago, *Creative Loafing* moved from weekly to monthly in 2017 and then stopped publishing altogether in 2022, and *Oracle 20/20* stopped publication within the last couple of years.

This franchise has been around since the early 2000s; I believe it was originally founded in 2000, but even Corporate doesn't know the exact year. For a quarter century, we've been the only Atlanta publication focused on holistic health, and, since 2017, on personal evolution. We believe we are a singular asset to the community.

In addition to publishing everything that Corporate provides, our franchise excels at local editorial. We've published many in-depth explorations, from energy healing to Enneagram; from healing the trauma of slavery to caring for melanated skin; from life coaching to health coaching; from Ayurveda to pranayama. Moreover, we have much more valuable content we want to publish, including deep dives into herbal medicine, meditation, hacking the subconscious and holistic psychotherapy.

Our commitment is to remain free—free in magazine racks across Atlanta, free online and free to the next reader who stumbles on a copy at their yoga studio and discovers something that shifts their health or life perspective. But every page we print, every article we edit, every mile we drive to deliver magazines costs more today than it ever has. Printing, our single largest line item, has gone up 50 percent.

Our Invitation

If *Natural Awakenings Atlanta* has informed, inspired or encouraged you in any way, please consider becoming a monthly supporter. Your contribution directly funds writing, editing, printing, distribution and all the efforts that keep this magazine going. There are no shareholders and no outside investors. There are only people like you who believe that independent reporting on holistic health and personal evolution matters. There are only people like you who value this platform for our health, wellness, and awakening community to share, promote and serve. We're not asking you to pay for access; we're asking you to ensure access for everyone.

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Together, we can keep *Natural Awakenings Atlanta* free, independent and thriving so that many more can access its informative and empowering content, connect with others in the community and/or receive a spark of inspiration that changes their lives. 🙏



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.



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SLCA's Rev. David Alexander Steps Down

After seven years of inspired service, Rev. Dr. David Alexander has stepped down as spiritual director of the Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta (SLCA) to begin a new chapter in Portland, Oregon.

"The transition marks a meaningful moment for the SLCA community, which has been guided by his vision of love, unity and spiritual transformation," says Executive Director Shannon Prewitt. "[It] brings both joy and sadness to our community—joy in witnessing what Spirit will unfold for Rev. David and his family, and sadness in knowing that his time as our minister is ending."

The Board of Trustees has appointed Associate Minister Rev. Jean Bell to serve as interim spiritual leader through March 2026, when members will determine the next step forward. Rev. Bell, a proud member of the LGBTQIA+ community and advocate for inclusivity, has served SLCA in various roles over the past 12 years, including practitioner, board member and education director. Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Rev. Jean has lived across the country and abroad and now calls Stone Mountain home. Rev. David officiated her ordination at SLCA in November.

"Please join us in expressing heartfelt gratitude to Rev. David for his years of visionary leadership and in offering full love and sup-



Executive Director Shannon Prewitt, Rev. Dr. David Alexander and Rev. Jean Bell

port to Rev. Jean as she guides our spiritual community through this next beautiful chapter," says Prewitt.

For more information, email info@SLC-Atlanta.org. The Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta is located at 3107 Clairmont Road in Atlanta.

Alive! Expo Pauses for 2026



Patrycja Towns

After 20 years of bringing together health-conscious consumers and sustainable brands, Alive! Expo, Atlanta's long-running natural products and green living event, will take a pause in 2026. Organizers say the decision comes in response to ongoing economic uncertainty, including tariffs and rising costs of products, production and raw materials.

"After speaking with many of our participating companies and sponsors, we learned that many are holding off on marketing and promotions for 2026," says Patrycja Siewert-Towns, founder and owner of the event. "So, after 20 years of bringing the Alive! Expo to Atlanta consumers, we are sad to announce that we had to make a very hard decision and are putting the event—what would have been our 21st annual event—on hold for 2026. We hope to bring the event back in 2027 when and if the economic state stabilizes and small to mid-sized companies once again are able to participate in events like this."

Alive! Expo, which is usually held in either April or May, will continue to promote natural brands and offers through its monthly email newsletter, website and social media channels to stay connected with its community.



For more information, visit AliveExpo.com and sign up for its monthly newsletter.

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- LINDA MINNICK

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The Joy of Local Holiday Shopping

Making the Most of the Human Touch

by Marlaina Donato

There is something special about stepping into the cozy warmth of a coffeehouse, sampling the latest offerings at the bakery or discovering a rare edition at the local bookshop. Our hometowns, like their people, have a unique spirit, and shopping locally during the holiday is a full-sensory delight. “Online shopping is convenient, but nothing beats an in-person interaction and seeing how happy a local business owner gets when you purchase something,” says Jacqueline De Leeuw, a fine artisan and owner of the thrift store Comfy Komodo, in Newton, New Jersey.

Despite Adobe Analytics reporting that American consumers spent \$241.4 billion online during last year’s holidays, Capital One’s research shows that 45 percent still prefer in-store shopping. This preference is driven by convenience, easy product comparison and a more enjoyable experience. Local stores offer shorter lines, fewer crowds, meaningful options and a chance to reduce our carbon footprint. The American Independent Business Alliance states that for every \$100 spent at an independent business, \$50 or more remains in the local economy, boosting prosperity, jobs and donations to local organizations.

Finding Treasures With Friends

Discovering local treasures provides social nourishment and counteracts our screen-dependent lifestyles. According to the U.S.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, social connection benefits long-term physical and mental health. “Talking with the folks who grow your food or make your gifts is almost extinct in our world. Farmers markets have revived that,” says Darlene Wolnik, senior project manager for the Farmers Market Coalition, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Fulfilling our senses with artisanal breads, seasonal produce freshly harvested from local soil and maple syrup tapped from nearby trees reconnects us with real life.

From hand-poured candles to artful ornaments, small businesses offer unique finds. Shopping can extend beyond purchases to include meeting friends for lunch or enjoying seasonal treats. The holidays are the perfect excuse to indulge in local fair-trade chocolates, regional wines, craft beers or small-batch gourmet coffees. “Nothing is better than meeting with family or friends and seeing where the day takes you, exploring local shops,” muses De Leeuw.

Wolnik agrees, suggesting, “You can make a morning of it and shop the entire town or Main Street before or after your farmers market visit.” She recommends checking if vendors offer holiday crafts. “A lot of farmers knit, weave and do woodworking. Also, many markets use a wooden token system to process card payments. If your market does that, buy tokens for friends, wrapped with a ribbon and a market flyer.”



Keeping It Local Year-Round

After the gifts and festivities, adopting inspiring habits can kickstart a new year. Choosing to shop locally more often positively impacts the environment because small businesses typically source their products regionally, reducing transit emissions.

Knowing the names of local servers, shopkeepers and baristas fosters a vibrant network of community engagement, enriching our everyday lives with meaning and a sense of belonging. “My favorite thing about supporting local shops is really connecting with the owners or the workers—finding out their story, how they started and what brought them here,” adds De Leeuw.

Creating monthly or weekly local shopping rituals can enhance family life or jazz-up date nights. Buying healthier bread at the bakery or herbal soap from a neighborhood artisan are simple ways to sustain the backyard economy while enjoying a slower, more relaxed pace and remaining open to the wonders along the way. 🌿

Marlaina Donato is an author, artist and composer. Connect at WildflowersAndWoodSmoke.com.



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Healing Ways 

The Heart Work of Kin-Keeping

Transforming Family Responsibilities Into a Shared Experience

by Hannah Tytus



Nicole Michalou from Pexels/CanvaPro

The holidays can be a celebration of joy and family time, but for many, they are also a marathon of invisible labor. Someone has to hold it all together, planning meals, wrapping gifts, coordinating visits and meeting everyone's expectations. Health psychologist Kari Leibowitz, author of *How to Winter*, notes, "The holidays are when we get wrapped up in shoulds—I should do this, or I've always done it this way. But things feel joyful only when the person carrying the load feels joyful, too." That person managing everything amid the chaos is the family kin-keeper.

In 1985, sociologist Carolyn Rosenthal coined the term "kin-keeping" to describe

the often-invisible work of maintaining family bonds: remembering birthdays, organizing holidays, coordinating visits and keeping everyone connected. A kin-keeper serves as the connective tissue across generations.

Kin-keeping work is rarely assigned; it is quietly assumed across families. The burden falls disproportionately on women, often passing from mother to daughter. Rosenthal's concept builds on a long history of women's unpaid labor in the home. Across cultures, someone—usually a woman—has been expected to weave the social fabric, whether through cooking, hosting or mediating family ties. These roles often arose out of necessity

but hardened into expectations. This important work demands time, intention and skill. It intensifies during the holidays when meals must be coordinated, gifts tracked and gatherings orchestrated. Even when roles are unspoken, someone absorbs the relational labor, becoming the family magic-maker.

Kin-keeping is critical for family cohesion. 2023 research published in *Sex Roles* shows that having a dedicated kin-keeper strengthens intergenerational bonds, encourages rituals and sustains relationships over time. Yet this labor is often unseen, underappreciated and unevenly distributed. Mothers, stepmothers and other female relatives frequently inherit the role, even in blended or post-divorce families. Step-relatives often find themselves bridging fractured family ties, carrying emotional work they never chose—work that can lead to stress, burnout and resentment. Kin-keepers can feel trapped by societal expectations to do it right, even when it hurts.

Sharing Family Responsibilities

Reimagining kin work begins by naming it. Recognizing the role and seeing it clearly allows the labor to be set down or shared when it feels heavy or disempowering. To make healthy changes, burdened kin-keepers can ask themselves how they might act from a place of loving intention rather than obligation.

Making invisible labor visible is another key step. Families can talk openly about who does what and acknowledge that sustaining a family is more than cooking meals or paying bills. It is emotional and relational work. Sharing responsibilities can lighten the load; one person can plan the meal, another take on decorations and a third handle travel logistics. Intentionally involving men and children in tasks helps create a more equitable distribution of labor.

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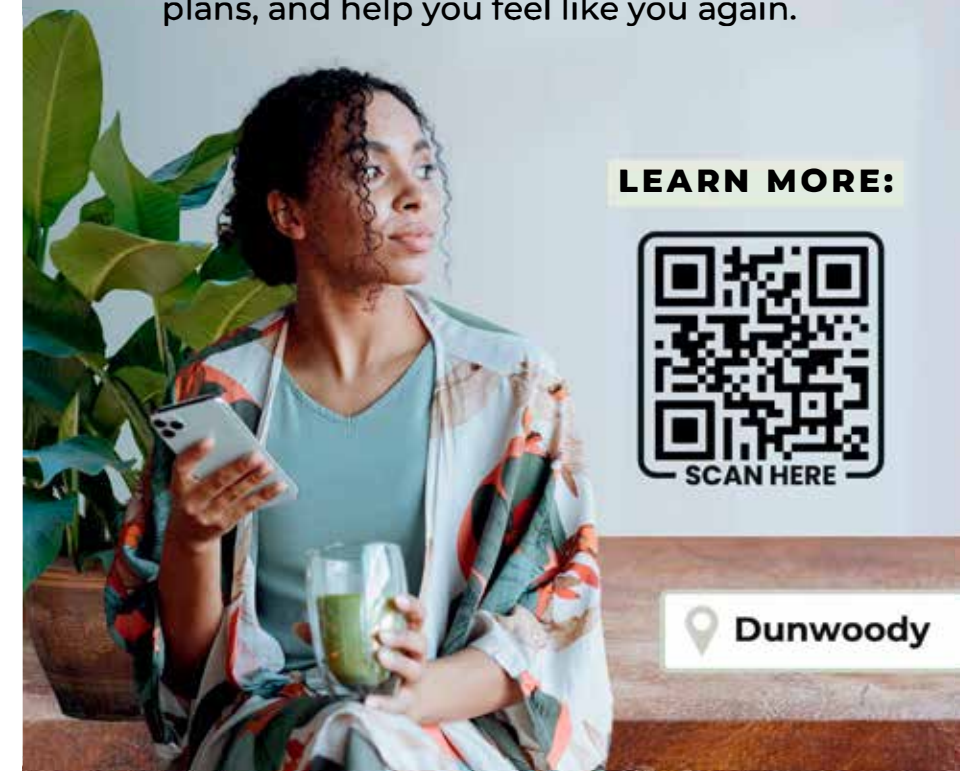
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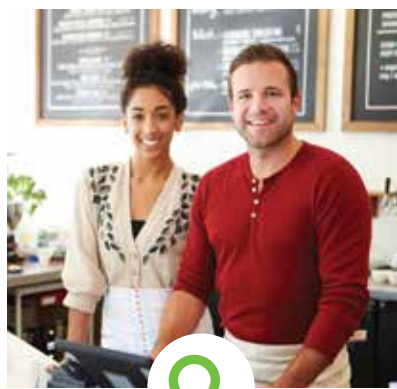


Creating New Traditions

Joy can be reclaimed by letting go of rituals that no longer serve the family, creating new traditions rooted in current realities and needs, and inviting others to co-create meaningful moments. Releasing the need for perfection will also offer relief from stringent responsibilities and create space for simple pleasures and joy. “When people look back on holidays, they rarely remember a perfectly cooked chicken or flawless table setting,” says Leibowitz. “They remember the wreath falling and everyone laughing together. The small, imperfect moments are what last.”

Kin-keeping is powerful because it holds families together. Those that take on this role can be proud of the heart work they do because it is precious. Yet this labor should not come at the cost of one person’s well-being. This season, we can ask what we want to carry and what we can set down. Healing begins by recognizing what was inherited and consciously choosing what to pass on. The magic of the holidays comes alive when care is rooted in fulfillment and agency rather than obligation. Kin-keeping is an act of love—but love does not have to mean doing it all alone. 🌱

Hannah Tytus is an integrative health coach, researcher and content creator for KnoWEwell, P.B.C., as well as a former writer at the National Institutes of Health.



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Conscious Eating ——— 🌱 ———

The Magic of Gourmet Salts

From *Fleur de Sel* to Himalayan Pink

by Maya Whitman



Specialty salts can transform everyday foods. To elevate the experience, add bold chili salt to a hearty winter stew, smoked salt to popcorn or ruby-colored wine salt to chocolate truffles. Flavored finishing salts surprise the tastebuds in ordinary dishes like oatmeal, desserts or hot cocoa. Used mindfully, gourmet salt reduces the need for excessive sodium and invites us to savor the extraordinary.

“I think salt is amazing and brings out the best in food—all those hidden flavors,” says Craig Cormack, a gourmet salt chef in Cape Town, South Africa. His career as a food artisan advanced in 2009 when he embraced specialty salts. “My personal collection is sitting at 232 naturally occurring salts from around the world,” adds Cormack, who favors unrefined regional varieties, but also enjoys bold options such as smoked Danish Viking salt for its ancient, bonfire-infused qualities.

Salts vary in texture, flavor and nuance based on their source and harvesting techniques, such as solar evaporation or hand-raking. Many contain trace minerals, adding depth to dishes, and when consumed in moderation, sea salt may benefit the body compared to refined salt.

Salt’s Good Side

Salt has a bad reputation for causing high blood pressure and other health conditions, but the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) states that more than 70 percent of dietary sodium comes from prepared and packaged foods, not from salt added at home. The FDA daily value for sodium is less than 2,300 milligrams per day, and using unrefined salts can be a healthier alternative to common table salt, which is demineralized and processed with anti-clumping agents. Celtic gray salt and other mineral-rich varieties contain naturally occurring, trace heavy metals, but also minerals like potassium, magnesium and calcium, which can help prevent the body from absorbing harmful metals like lead.

“We all need salt in moderation to live. The best way to ingest salt is to season your own food. Processed food has too much salt, and you can’t control your intake. Naturally made, mineral-rich salt is the best choice,” affirms Nancy Bruns, a seventh-generation salt maker at J.Q. Dickinson Salt-Works, in Malden, West Virginia. She and her family produce rare, small-batch finishing salts harvested from the ancient Iapetus Ocean beneath the Appalachian Mountains.

Spanning the Salt Spectrum

Whether sourced from evaporated seawater (sea salt) or underground salt mines (rock salt), there is much to choose from. Sea salt comes in various colors, coarseness and complex flavors. Highly prized flake salt—*fleur de sel* from coastal France—is hand-harvested from evaporation ponds with clay bottoms and, with its delicate, paper-thin crystals, offers delicious nuances as a finishing salt. Celtic gray salt, sourced deeper within evaporation ponds, contains more moisture and minerals.

Himalayan pink salt, mined from salt beds formed from ancient seas approximately 600 million years ago, contains more than 80 minerals and has a rosy color due to the presence of iron oxide and magnesium. Black volcanic rock salt, also known as Himalayan black salt or *kala namak*, has a pungent, sulfuric quality that diminishes with heat during cooking and imparts an egg-like aroma and taste that can be useful in vegan recipes. The large, coarse grains of kosher salt traditionally used in Hebrew cuisine give food a robust, briny quality and satisfying texture.

Salt can be infused with herbs, spices, fruits and smoke from various woods to create a multitude of flavor qualities and moods. Bruns highlights her ramp-infused salt, which is combined with wild onions gathered during the Appalachian springtime. Charred oak from old bourbon barrels makes their smoked salt a favorite for grills and even chocolate desserts. Cormack spotlights the fine indulgence of Tartuflanghe brand truffle salt from Italy for an unforgettable mushroom risotto.

Bruns is grateful for the timeless spirit of salt. “I come to work on the same land where my ancestors made salt for over 150 years. I feel their presence, as if they are watching over my shoulder. That legacy and sense of stewardship is present every time I sprinkle salt on my food.” 🌱

Maya Whitman is a frequent writer for Natural Awakenings.

POMEGRANATE PICKLED FISH

This gourmet holiday dish is ideal for a dinner party.

YIELD: 8 SERVINGS

3½ lbs yellowtail fish, skinned
6½ oz vegetable oil
3½ lbs sliced onions
1 Tbsp garam masala
1 tsp fennel seeds
1 tsp coriander seeds
1 tsp black peppercorns
4 whole cloves
4 to 5 bay leaves
¾ cup, combined, equal amounts of dried apricots and sultanas (golden raisins)
2 cup white or red wine (red wine gives fish a deeper color)
½ Tbsp coarse salt
5 Tbsp white wine vinegar
2 Tbsp brown sugar
Seeds of 1 large pomegranate

FOR HOMEMADE LIME MAYO

5 large egg yolks
1 Tbsp English mustard
Juice of two limes
Zest from one lime
1½ cups sunflower oil
1 tsp salt
Preheat the oven to 400° F.

Place fish in a baking dish, allowing space for sauce.

Heat the vegetable oil in a Dutch oven or a flat wide pot. Add onions, cover and sauté at low heat for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until they become sweet.

Stir in garam masala, fennel, coriander, peppercorns, cloves and bay leaves. Turn



heat up to medium and fry for 30 seconds to temper the spice, and then add the apricots, sultanas, wine and salt. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 20 minutes.

Remove pan from heat and stir in the vinegar and sugar until well incorporated into the sauce. Pour sauce over the fish. Cover baking dish with foil and bake for 20 minutes.

Remove dish from oven, let it cool completely and then refrigerate for at least a day.

Add all the lime mayo ingredients into a bowl, except for the sunflower oil. Slowly add the oil while whisking the ingredients vigorously. When all the oil is added, the mix should be velvety smooth and be able to hold its own shape. Store in the refrigerator.

Serve cold fish on a salad with homemade lime mayo. Garnish with a sprinkle of pomegranate seeds.

Recipe courtesy of Craig Cormack.

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Cultivating Joy

How Movement, Gratitude and Connection Transform Our Lives

by Hannah Tytus



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“Discovering more joy does not, I’m sorry to say, save us from the inevitability of hardship and heartbreak. In fact, we may cry more easily, but we will laugh more easily, too. Perhaps we are just more alive,” reflected the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu in *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, where he shared wisdom alongside the Dalai Lama.

Joy invites us to be more alive. It surfaces through awareness, connection and acceptance of the present moment, exactly as it is. As winter days grow shorter and the year draws to a close, this is a wonderful time to explore what joy truly is, the things that block it and how it can be reclaimed. Ultimately, joy is not a reward for a perfect life, but a way of being that

reminds us to embody our full humanity. Though sometimes fleeting, joy can be profoundly sustaining.

A Physical Experience

“Joy is much bigger than happiness,” asserted Tutu. “While happiness is often seen as being dependent on external circumstances, joy is not.” This mindset—rooted in both heart and spirit—aligns closely with the Dalai Lama’s vision that genuine fulfillment comes from recognizing the deep interconnectedness of all living beings. Joy is an embodied emotion that is distinct from happiness. Happiness is stable, evaluative and may reflect broader life satisfaction—a contentment with one’s career, finances, family, romantic relationships or personal fulfillment—while joy is experienced in the present moment. It is intense, yet fleeting.

In a study conducted in 2025 and published in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being*, researchers interviewed 14 adults about their experiences of joy. The findings explain joy as a complex emotion shaped by individual, relational and cultural contexts. According to the research, joy is intense, transcendent and deeply felt—often arising spontaneously in response to meaningful experiences or connections.

In contrast, happiness encompasses a broader spectrum, exhibiting greater stability, and is associated with life satisfaction and contentment. Participants described joy as a somatic experience, identifying sensations such as “a rush of warmth and lightness throughout the body,” “electricity,” “a bubbling up,” and “tingling sensations,” accompanied by “the urge to move, smile and embrace others.” These visceral reactions often accompanied moments of intense connection, awe and accomplishment.

If joy is felt through the body, movement itself becomes a doorway to experience it more fully. This cultivation of joy is the cornerstone of Jennifer Joy Jiménez’s life’s work. A pioneer in integrative movement and founder of the Brave Thinking Institute’s Health & Well-Being Division, she developed TranscenDANCE, a conscious dance modality for all ages and mobility levels designed to improve mental, emotional and physical health through inspiring music, body positivity and free-form movement.

Conscious dance is any form of movement that emphasizes mindfulness, inner exploration and emotional release rather than performance or choreography. Although these transformative movement practices have existed for thousands of years, Jiménez laments that for many Americans, dance may be confined to weddings, occasional outings or fitness classes, leaving little room for the expressive and emotive daily practice that “allows our soul-self to move our human self.”

Jiménez asserts, “Just a few minutes of dancing releases the happy hormones, offering a DOSE [dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin and endorphins] that shifts our mood better than any antidepressant.” Scientific evidence supports this assertion. A 2024 meta-analysis published in *The BMJ* analyzed 218 clinical trials, demonstrating that dance was more effective in alleviating depression symptoms than walking, yoga, strength training and even traditional antidepressants.

The Social Nexus

Joy thrives on connection. While it can arise in solitude, it naturally expands most effectively through relationships and shared humanity. When individuals feel seen, supported and part of something larger than themselves, their sense of well-being deepens.

The 2024 *World Happiness Report* identifies social support as one of the strongest predictors of life satisfaction. Similarly, the *Harvard Study of Adult Development*—one of the longest-running longitudinal studies of human health—has shown that healthy, fulfilling relationships are the single greatest predictors of both longevity and life satisfaction.

This growing body of research underscores that social connection shapes health across our lifespan. Individuals that maintain meaningful relationships exhibit lower risks of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, infections, cognitive decline and depression compared to those that are lonely. When people share laughter, empathy or a sense of belonging, they exhibit improvements to their nervous system and immune function, as well as an expanded capacity to experience joy.

Isolation’s Impact

While connection nurtures joy, disconnection erodes it. In *The Book of Joy*, the Dalai Lama identified loneliness as one of the most significant obstacles to joy, emphasizing that it arises not from isolation itself, but from a mindset of separation. A person can live alone in the wilderness and still

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feel content, while another may feel lonely in a crowded room. Loneliness, he suggests, emerges when the heart closes—when anger, fear or stress obscure the ability to perceive warmth in others.

Many modern experiences reinforce this sense of separation. Chronic stress, fatigue, poverty and depression all constrict the emotional space needed for joy. Cultural ideals built around constant happiness add another layer of strain. Researchers describe how placing pressure on ourselves to be perpetually positive leads us to suppress authentic emotion, rather than cultivate genuine contentment. The Dalai Lama observed that persistent anxiety keeps the mind spinning in worry, unable to rest in presence.

Emotional avoidance further narrows the capacity for joy. According to the 2024 *World Happiness Report*, individuals that intentionally process difficult experiences report a 40 percent increase in life satisfaction. Gratitude research suggests the reason behind this phenomenon: Recognizing joy requires openness and receptivity. When individuals soften their defenses and allow life's full range of emotion, they create space for joy to return.

Cultivating Gratitude

Adopting an attitude of gratitude is one of the best ways to cultivate joy. Recognized by the Dalai Lama as one of the “8 Pillars of Joy”, gratitude has been shown to enhance the capacity to perceive joy in everyday life. Gratitude increases joy, and joy, in turn, increases gratitude in an upward spiral of positive disposition. A 2018 study published in *The Journal of Positive Psychology* revealed that when the participants practiced gratitude regularly, it



became part of their natural disposition. Participants that exhibited greater gratitude also experienced heightened levels of joy.

Jiménez notes that cultivating gratitude—and therefore joy—is not just a matter of responding to positive circumstances. “There is a difference between gratitude for and gratitude in. It’s easy to be grateful for positive windfalls like

winning the lottery or receiving a nice gift. But when something challenging happens, such as a loved one receiving a serious medical diagnosis, how can we be grateful in that moment for the gift that lies in the wisdom of that situation?” Viewing challenging events as lessons with the potential for wisdom and healing helps us cultivate a more resilient kind of gratitude.

As Tutu and the Dalai Lama teach, joy is not the absence of struggle but the presence of heart. It lives in the body, grows through connection and deepens through gratitude. To reclaim it, we must soften the grip of perfection, release the myth of constant happiness and allow space for both laughter and tears.

Jiménez reminds us that joy is something to be practiced—not achieved—through movement, mindfulness and a willingness to feel. Gratitude becomes the bridge that turns awareness into aliveness, inviting us to notice what was there all along. When people pause long enough to be present, they discover that joy does not need to be sought. It simply needs to be welcomed. 🌱

Hannah Tytus is an integrative health coach, researcher and content creator for KnoWEwell, P.B.C., as well as a former writer at the National Institutes of Health.

Cross Training for Holistic Health

Advantages of a Well-Rounded Exercise Routine

by Jordan Peschek, RN-BSN

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans advises adults to engage in at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise weekly, along with muscle-strengthening activities for major muscle groups at least twice a week.

Cross training is a powerful approach that combines aerobic and strength training into one dynamic routine, helping individuals reach their physical fitness goals more efficiently. According to Dawn Coleman, an American Council on Exercise-certified personal trainer in Cedarburg, Wisconsin, “Cross training benefits greatly outweigh focusing on one particular type of training. By creating multiple stimuli for the body, you allow it to adapt quickly to input, prevent injuries and allow the body to be prepared for the unknown scenario.”

Benefits of Diversified Workouts

For everyone, regardless of age or ability, integrating aerobic or cardiovascular exercise with resistance or strength training offers many health benefits, including reduced stress, better sleep, improved self-esteem, enhanced immune function and heart health, as well as beneficial bone mass and body weight. Despite these advantages, many may be hesitant to start cross training due to uncertainty about where to begin.



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Building Strength and Endurance

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) Integrated Fitness Training (IFT) Model provides four training phases, depending on the abilities and goals of an individual. Beginners, for example, ease into exercises that enhance postural stability, core activation and static balance with exercises such as planks, single-leg stands with core contraction and a heel-to-toe walk with a three-second pause after each step, respectively. Additional exercises are gradually introduced to enhance a person's health and function, with a focus on five primary movements:

1. Bending and lifting (squats)
2. Single-leg movement (lunges)
3. Pushing (bench press, push-ups and triceps extensions)
4. Pulling (pull-ups, one-arm rows and bicep curls)
5. Spinal rotation (lying knee-to-chest twists and planks with side-to-side twists)

For example, a regular jogger might not know which strength exercises to pair with their running routine, while gym-goers lifting weights may be reluctant to add cardio. Whether someone is a competitive runner aiming to prevent injury and build strength or a non-athlete looking to optimize health as they age, combining both strength and cardiovascular training is a fun and effective choice.

“I see a lot of overtraining-related injuries when athletes fail to diversify from their sport,” says Tessa Kothe, a practitioner in Colorado Springs with a Ph.D. in physical therapy. “Clients who implement cross training tend to end up more robust, healthier and recover from their injuries much faster than those who do not diversify their training.”

Once these more advanced exercises can be performed safely in the correct form, then weight or resistance is added. The final phase of the ACE IFT Model involves performance training with functional movements that incorporate load, movement and speed to boost agility, quickness and power.


Cross training combines strength and cardiorespiratory benefits into a single workout by alternating between strength-based and aerobic activities, engaging multiple systems in the body. It appeals to those that value a holistic wellness approach due to its adaptability. Sessions can be tailored to individual needs, energy levels, wellness goals and time constraints. By choosing enjoyable and convenient exercises, we can avoid monotony and increase the likelihood of making them a regular part of life.

Create an atmosphere of love and joy and pave smooth My way.

Manifest the Love which I send you, demonstrate the Gods which you are, and usher in a new and better time.

Do this for Me, My friends and brothers, and rejoice soon in My Appearance among you.

My Emergence proceeds. My Plans unfold. My message at this time of joyous celebration is this: awaken anew the Love in the hearts of your brothers and teach them to share.



Maitreya, the World Teacher

A cross training day might include a hike with weighted walking poles or a 15-minute yoga flow followed by a workout with light resistance bands. Another example is combining 10 to 20 minutes of rowing or stair climbing with 20 minutes of core work, squats and lunges.

During aerobic activities like walking, running, biking or swimming, ACE recommends beginning with 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise at a pace that allows easy conversation, then gradually adding longer workouts, intervals, increased speed or higher intensity.

For newcomers to cross training, begin with two sessions per week, alternating 15 minutes of strength training with 15 to 20 minutes of cardio or mobility work. This can be gradually increased to meet the recommended weekly physical activity guidelines.

Tips for Success

- **Listen to the body.** Each day is different. Honor energy levels and prioritize form and safety over intensity.
- **Fuel and recover well.** Whole foods, hydration and ample sleep are essential for muscle repair and sustained energy.
- **Keep it simple.** Basic tools like a yoga mat, jump rope or pair of dumbbells are often all that is needed to get started.
- **Seek community.** Group classes, virtual platforms or one-on-one guidance can provide structure, proper form instruction and encouragement.

Cross training is more than just a workout plan; it is a practice of self-care, strength and sustainability. For those embracing holistic living, this style of movement aligns well with long-term wellness goals. It is about cultivating a resilient, vibrant body and mind that can carry us through the decades with grace. 🌿

Jordan Peschek has a background in personal training, yoga instruction and mental health nursing. She publishes the Milwaukee and Twin Cities editions of Natural Awakenings.

Gifts of Seeing, Hearing, and Touching

Staying Grounded During the Holidays

by Patricia Schmidt



It can be challenging to stay grounded and present in one's life during the holidays. Many plan celebrations months in advance as presents are purchased ahead of time, menus are organized and even pre-prepared and future party dates are "saved." Family travel plans require advance booking of passage and accommodation, time off from work and pet care. And for many, the past can exert a powerful pull on the experience.

All of that planning, researching and purchasing can leave people feeling scattered, distracted and depleted. What can we do about it?

Ayurveda, the sister science of yoga, explains these uncomfortable feelings as imbalances, and one of the remedies it recommends is to ground the body-mind in the lived moment in order to restore a sense of balance. For some yoga practitio-

ners, yoga postures themselves work to bring sensation into their lived experience and help them to leave behind some of the worry, depletion and excess planning that are so easy to fall into.

Another very effective mindfulness technique to ground in the present moment is to connect to the senses using what is sometimes referred to as the "54321 method." The numbers refer to the practice of listing five things one can see; four that are audible at that moment; three that one can feel or touch; two that one can smell, and a last thing that one can taste. The number of items can vary, but the general idea remains the same, and the technique has been proven in many research studies to serve a diverse range of people.

Given the pitfalls of the holidays, the 54321 technique provides an approach to the season for yoga practitioners who want to stay connected to the present moment. They might notice their own imbalances, for example, but perhaps find it hard to carve out time for yoga postural practice. Thinking of the five senses also provides a playful approach to gift-giving and approaching the holidays more generally, as it can help keep the gift-giver focused on the great diversity of experiences available right here in the Atlanta metro area. Further, sharing gifts like these with friends and family extends the yogic spirit of good relationships and community and encourages non-harming and non-hoarding practices taught by ancient texts.

Gifts to See

For the yoga student delighted by the eye, perhaps there's no better experience of practicing yoga than one in and around the natural world. Dancing Dogs Yoga in Inman Park leads yoga practice at the Georgia Aquarium, while its studios in Marietta, Roswell and Dunwoody invite students to practice outdoors at nature preserves, local amphitheatres and retail lawn spaces. Joiful Yoga in Sandy Springs offers free children's yoga on the City Springs Green throughout the holiday period. The whole idea is to notice the natural environment in all its splendor, the other living creatures sharing the space and fellow yoga students, too.

More visual delights can be experienced through the art-making offerings at some local studios. For example, Aum studio in Alpharetta offers one-off classes in string art and other art-therapy practices to increase mindfulness.

Gifts to Hear

Getting out into nature and supporting local environmental initiatives with both money and energy is another great way of connecting to the senses and increasing mindfulness. Atlanta benefits from the presence of the Chattahoochee River, which also needs support. Local nature preserves such as Cascade Springs in Westside, Blue Heron in Buckhead and the Chattahoochee Nature Preserve in Roswell, offer immersive, hands-on experiences that can be part of holiday gift-giving. Bird- and water-lovers can con-

nect to the present through what they hear while supporting their local environmental initiatives at the same time.

If the yoga studio calls, many local businesses offer sound baths. Gruvn Yoga in Marietta, for example, offers drumming workshops for those more inclined to make sounds themselves.

Gifts to Touch and Feel

When it comes to sensation, some people prefer to feel, and others prefer to touch. Luckily, local yoga studios and other small businesses have options for both types of people. PeakZen Yoga in East Cobb partners with Pause Studio, which offers a range of physical wellness experiences such as cold plunge, infrared and float therapy. For the yoga lover, pairing yoga practice with physical experience provides a wonderful gift. Other yoga studios, such as Many Paths Wellness in Roswell, offer Thai massage and reiki for those who want to receive touch and sensation.

If active hands and actually doing and making is a more appropriate gift, other local studios, such as Vista Yoga in Decatur, are offering the chance to donate time and resources to put baskets together for under-resourced communities. For example, grandparents without funds themselves will be given baskets of toys to give to their grandchildren, and food donations are collected, put together and delivered to local pantries. Individuals or family

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Rest Assured: Embodied Rest Yoga Session 2 – 5:30-8pm. Gentle yoga, journaling, and community tea inspired by the Rest Assured exhibit. All levels welcome. Free. Nina Baldwin Gallery, 309 Peters St SW #1, Atlanta. bit.ly/Embodied-Rest-Yoga-120625

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Monthly Sound Healing at Southern Lotus – 6:30-7:30pm. Relax with soothing vibrations in a serene space for balance and renewal. Ages 14+. Free. Southern Lotus Yoga, 2137 GA-155 N, McDonough. bit.ly/Sound-Healing-at-Lotus-Yoga-Studio-120725

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Wednesday Wind Down: Free Yoga + Run/Walk – 5:45-8:30pm. Join a free yoga class and optional 3-mile run to reset midweek. All levels welcome. Free. Medical & Sports Massage, 6000 Lake Forrest Dr NW, Ste 375, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Wednesday-Wind-Down-Yoga-121025

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

Discussion Night: Bridge Between Worlds – 6:30-8pm. Meditation, storytelling, movement, and open discussion to foster connection and spiritual awakening. \$20. AUM Studio for Wellness, 3308 Laventure Dr, Chamblee. bit.ly/Aum-Studio

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

Second Saturday Series – 10:30-11:30am. Monthly Vinyasa flow in a reimagined historic church, with surprises and lavender savasana towels. \$19.44. The Abbey Studio, 638 Glenwood Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Second-Saturday-Vinyasa-Series-121325

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

Reynoldstown Community Yoga – 10-11am. Outdoor Vinyasa flow followed by coffee and connection at ParkGrounds. Donation-based. Lang Carson Rec Center, 100 Flat Shoals Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Community-Yoga-Vinyasa-Flow-121425

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

Hot Pilates Push – 7-8pm. A hot Pilates and strength fusion class designed to build strength, confidence, and com-

munity through intentional movement. \$15. Creatives Rental Space, 1483 Chattahoochee Ave NW, Ste 110, Atlanta. bit.ly/Hot-Pilates-Push-121525

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

Christmas Edition: Innercise Yoga at the Georgian Terrace – 6-8pm. Holiday-themed yoga on the terrace followed by a complimentary cocktail or mocktail. Wear festive gear. \$28.52. The Georgian Terrace, 659 Peachtree St NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Innercise-Yoga-at-Georgian-Terrace-121825

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

Yoga Experience at InterContinental Buckhead – 10:15-11am. Yoga session with sound bath meditation, lavender towels, fruit water, and spa/dining discounts. Free. InterContinental Buckhead, 3315 Peachtree Rd NE, Windsor Ballroom, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-at-InterContinental-Buckhead-122025

Winter Solstice Yoga, Reiki and Sound Immersion – 5:30-8pm. Celebrate the return of light through yin yoga, sound healing and Reiki. Deep relaxation with essential oils. \$60 advance; \$65 door. Vista Yoga, Decatur. VistaYoga.com

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4

Hops & Flow Beer Yoga at The Grove – 10-11am. Enjoy an all-levels yoga class with your choice of beer or coffee at Monday Night Brewing's newest location. \$25.24. The Grove at Monday Night Brewing, 670 Trabert Ave NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Hops-and-Flow-Yoga-010426

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groups can sign up to participate in these donation drives as a shared holiday activity.

Gifts to Smell

Public yoga studios have shifted away from burning incense, Palo Santo, or scented candles in recent years, in recognition that many people are sensitive to fragrance. But many students still delight in scent. While studios themselves may continue to sell locally-made candles, for example, an experience of candle-making or essential oil blending might be right up the gift-giving vibe for a loved one or group event.

For example, many yogis like to have scents in their personal practice space at home, and where a candle or room deodorizer is appropriate, Crafted Creations Studio in Chamblee offers maker experiences for home fragrances, and LIT Essentials in Grant Park has partnered with JustFlow Wellness to offer immersive scent experiences, including sessions for making body butter, soap and roll-ons.

Gifts to Taste

Finally, Ayurveda is all about providing education about and the enjoyment of the nourishing aspects of all the things we take into our body and mind—including the food we eat. Ayurvedic cookbooks, consultations, retreats and cooking classes offer gifts related to the sense of taste. On a more systemic level, they can work to ground

the body and mind for long periods of time. Additionally, kitchens in the Atlanta community offer food-based, gift-making experiences that can round out a gift basket or become the whole gift itself. Think home-made bread loaves and granola!

Vista Yoga in Decatur also offers Ayurvedic cooking classes with Maha Moon Studio owner Marnie Memmolo, while Atlanta-based SAMA Food for Balance will ship soups, juices, smoothies and teas that conform to ayurvedic principles to anywhere in the country. Local Hindu temples also offer Ayurvedic consultations, and nourishment can be sourced from farmers' markets throughout the city. And Atlanta-based SaristoSuits also offers Ayurvedic food and cooking classes as part of their annual spring fundraiser for domestic violence survivors.

Enjoy your gift-giving by staying local, staying present and staying grounded through the senses! 🌱



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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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Publicize your event! This section hosts free and paid listings. Each month, we select a limited number of events — they must have broad appeal and cost no more than \$40 to attend — to list for free. Otherwise, basic listings are \$1/word, \$40 minimum, and enhanced listings are \$75. Submit free listings to matsakis99@gmail.com and paid listings to paul@naatlanta.com.

Thursday, December 4

Transmission Meditation Talk & Practice – 7:30-9pm. Learn a group meditation for world service and spiritual growth. Open to all. Free. Online via Eventbrite. Share International USA. Info: 770-302-2208, info-se@share-international.us. bit.ly/Transmission-Meditation-120425

Saturday, December 6

Fall into Fitness with McDonough Walking Club – 8:30-9:30am. Walk for wellness and mentorship. Bring a toy or toiletry for the holiday giveaway. Free. 355 Jonesboro Rd, McDonough. Hosted by Young Dreamers International. bit.ly/Fitness-Walking-Club-120625

Gifts from the Kitchen – 2-5pm. Create heartfelt holiday gifts like jam, crackers, cookies, salt blends, scrubs and dog treats. Includes all gluten- and soy-free ingredients, containers and wrap. \$75. Vista Yoga, Decatur. VistaYoga.com

Sunday, December 7

Grant Park Meditation: Mindfulness Basics – 2-3pm. Guided meditation with instruction, gentle stretching, and sitting/walking practice. All welcome. Free. Chua Quang Minh, 1168 Benteen Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Mindfulness-Meditation-120725

Monthly Sound Healing at Southern Lotus Yoga Studio – 6:30-7:30pm. Relax and rejuvenate with a guided sound healing session promoting balance and inner peace. Ages 14+. Free. Southern Lotus Yoga, 2137 GA-155 N, McDonough. bit.ly/Sound-Healing-at-Lotus-Yoga-120725

Monday, December 8

Mental Health in the Workforce – 6-8pm. CEOs, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders gather to launch workplace mental health programming. Free. Cecil B. Day Chapel, 453 John Lewis Freedom Pkwy NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Mental-Health-In-The-Workforce-120825

MOMmoves: The Mental Wellness Edition – 7-9pm. A supportive session for single moms on mental health awareness, led by therapist Alex Thompson. Free. 6328 Mableton Pkwy, Mableton. Free parking. bit.ly/MOMmoves-Mental-Wellness-Edition-120825

Wednesday, December 10

Women's Walk Wednesday – 6-7pm. Enjoy a midweek wellness walk through scenic trails with supportive community vibes. All women welcome. Free. Morgan Falls Overlook Park, 200 Morgan Falls Rd, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Womens-Walk-Wednesday-121025

Root & Release: Guided Stretch Class – 6-7pm. Midweek slow-paced stretch with breathwork to release tension and restore balance. All levels welcome. Free. Warzone Fitness, 5727 Palazzo Way, Douglasville. bit.ly/Guided-Slow-Paced-Stretch-Class-121025

Thursday, December 11

Live Life Pain-Free: Medical & Sports Massage – 9:30am-7pm. Targeted massage therapies for pain relief, recovery, and wellness. Appointments preferred; walk-ins welcome. Free. Medical & Sports Massage, 6000 Lake Forrest Dr NW, Ste 375, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Medical-and-Sports-Massage-121125

Merry and Mindful: Wellness Networking Event – 11am-1:30pm. Relax and connect with like-minded individuals through mindful activities in a peaceful setting. Free. 205 Jeff Davis Pl, Fayetteville. bit.ly/Merry-and-Mindful-121125

Community Reiki/Healing Night – 6-7pm. Free evening Reiki session to reconnect, ground, and restore clarity and energy. All welcome. The Hoot Spot, 3883 Rogers Bridge Rd, Ste 206A, Duluth. bit.ly/Community-Reiki-Healing-Night-121125

Friday, December 12

The Purpose Lab: Self-Discovery & Inner Growth – 6:30-8:30pm. Explore mantra meditation, yoga philosophy, and conscious community over vegan snacks. Free. Soul-Works108, 483 Moreland Ave NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Compass-for-Self-Discovery-121225

Saturday, December 13

Free Saturday HIIT Workout Class – 10-11am. High-intensity interval training to boost fitness, burn fat, and build strength. All levels welcome. Free. Jamie The Motivator, 3365 W Hospital Ave, Ste G, Chamblee. bit.ly/HIIT-Workout-Class-121325

Heal in Peace Circle – 11am-12pm. A supportive weekly gathering for emotional healing, shared stories, and inner peace. Free. Wolf Creek Library, 3100 Enon Rd, Atlanta. Hosted by BizzyLux Events. bit.ly/Heal-In-Peace-Circle-121325

Sunday, December 14

Unity Atlanta Church "12 Powers Workshop" – 12:30-2pm. You're invited to explore how you can use your God-given powers to improve your life. Each month, Licensed Unity Teacher, Freda Steward, will present one of the twelve spiritual powers available to all people. Feel free to bring a bag lunch. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Monday, December 15

Free Capoeira Class in Downtown Decatur – 7:15-8pm. Discover the rhythm and power of Capoeira—a dynamic fusion of martial arts, dance, and music from Brazil. Free. 133 Sycamore St, Decatur. bit.ly/Capoeira-Class-in-Decatur-121525

Tuesday, December 16

Sanctuary: At Home In The Body – 6:30-10pm. Explore breath, vinyasa, and mindful movement in a somatic workshop themed "Kizoku Ishiki: Deep Sense of Belonging." Free. The Anchor, 645 Grant St, Atlanta. bit.ly/At-Home-In-Body-Workshops-121625

Wednesday, December 17

Just Walk with Carolyn Hartfield – 10-11am. Enjoy a 2-mile community walk with health tips from a certified coach. All levels welcome. Free. Mason Mill Park, 1400 McConnell Dr, Decatur. bit.ly/Just-Walk-With-Carolyn-Hartfield-121725

Thursday, December 18

Free Salsa Dance Lessons – Dance, Wine, Dine & Unwind – 8:30-10pm. Enjoy tapas and cocktails, then hit the floor with free salsa lessons and live music by Willie Zivino & the C.O.T. Band. Free. Eclipse di Luna, 764 Miami Circle NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Salsa-Dance-Lesson-Tapas-and-Live-Band-121825

Saturday, December 20

Red Light Running Society: Run or Walk – 10am-12pm. Join a community-focused run or walk supporting happy, healthy, and active lifestyles. All fitness levels welcome. Free. Red Light Cafe, 553 Amsterdam Ave NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Run-or-Walk-122025

Saturday, December 27

Sunrise Hike at Stone Mountain/Kennesaw – 5:30am. Monthly hike for wellness, networking, and sunrise meditation. Location alternates; no December hike due to holidays. Free + parking fee. Details: Stone Mountain/Kennesaw Mountain. bit.ly/Mount-Kennesaw-Hike-122725

Sunday, December 28

Let's Go PLIRDING! SRT – 9:30-11am. Join a birding walk with a conservation twist—pick up litter while observing local wildlife. All ages welcome. Free. Michelle Obama Trail, 3113 Gresham Rd SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Lets-Go-Plurding-122825

"Spiritual Keys to Aging Well" – 12:30-1:30pm. This monthly discussion group is based on the booklet, "Spiritual Keys to Aging Well," by Unity World Headquarters at Unity Village. Copies are available at the event. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

ONGOING

Sundays

Practicing the Presence - A Course in Miracles – 8:45-10:30 am. This weekly Zoom study group aims at removing the blocks to the awareness of love's presence. Facilitator: Michael Wilkinson. An open and ongoing class. All are welcome. For more info and to receive the Zoom link, email: MWilkinson@leadstrat.com. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta Sunday Experience. Starting at 3 pm music and Science of Mind message; 4 pm Food and fellowship; 5 pm New Thought workshops. 2650 N. Druid Hills Rd. N.E., Atlanta, GA 30329. More Info: slc-atlanta.org

Red Clay Sangha Sunday Morning Service – 9am, Sitting/Walking Meditation; 10:30, Morning Service; 10:45am, Dharma Discussion; 11:30am, Clossie and Brunch. 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.

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: uuca.org/live.

Unity Atlanta Church Sunday Services – 11am-12pm "Spiritual Keys for Life" - All are invited to the Fall Faith Message Series by Rev. Jennifer L. Sacks featuring the teachings of Minister and Master New Thought Writer, Emmet Fox. Attend in-person or watch via livestream. Youth Sunday School is in-person at 11am for ages 5-18. Nursery service is available 10:30am-12:30pm. 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.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 Pranich Healing Center via Zoom. To watch: AtIPranichHealing.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

The Art of Preserving Balance and Vitality Through Movement – 6-7pm. Discover the ancient art of cultivating Chi to enhance well-being. Learn to manage stress, channel emotions, and deepen your connection with life. \$18/class; packages available. Zoom. Efraín Brady, 470-281-8645. PathsToIntegration.com.

Online Meditation Open House – 7-8pm meditation, 8-8:30pm discussion, followed by tea and cookies. 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.

Wednesdays

Meditation & Modern Buddhism – 7:00-8:30pm. 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. MeditationIn-Georgia.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.

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.

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.

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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Holiday 7.0

by Trish Ahjel Roberts

Christmas, 1973. I was still the youngest in my family. A giant tree with crystal ornaments filled our Brooklyn living room. The presents kept coming. I was five years old, and you couldn't tell me I wasn't special. When the rest of the family arrived, there were so many of us kids, we had our own special table in the living room while the adults ate in the dining room. Laughter and Nat King Cole wafted through the hallways along with the aroma of roasted turkey, ham and pecan pie. I might call this Holiday 1.0. Childhood.

When I became an adult with a family of my own, the holidays meant visiting the home I grew up in. By then, there weren't as many people around. Mom and Dad were still there, but some relatives had died or simply didn't spend the holidays with us anymore.. Kids had grown up and moved on. I had the responsibility of visiting my in-laws, too. The holidays were full of fun, but also obligations. The adults would dress up in red sweaters, wrap lots of gifts, and head over to see family. Holiday 2.0 was in full effect. The Young Wife Days.

After my divorce, my experience of the holidays changed again. The Christmas fantasy I grew up with fell apart. There was no husband carving the turkey for me. I had to play the role of Santa alone. When my daughter was six, we moved to Atlanta and created new traditions. We went to the local Christmas tree lighting every year, drank hot chocolate, enjoyed the night air and screamed when Santa showed up on a fire truck. Some years, we traveled back to Brooklyn, but usually my parents made the trip to Atlanta so we could all be together. Holiday 3.0 was full of angst sprinkled with good times – The Early Single Mom Years.

Then the unthinkable happened. Mom died.

It felt like my life unraveled. Some family relationships collapsed. Some revealed their brokenness. Nothing was the same. Now, Christmas meant visiting my girlfriend and her family with carefully wrapped vegan side dishes and gifts to exchange. I didn't always see my dad on Christmas anymore, either. My daughter and my dog were my steady family. Holiday 4.0 A.M. (After Mom) didn't have the same luster, but I was grateful to have friends who were there for me.

As my lifestyle began to change, friendships fizzled. I already didn't eat meat, then I stopped drinking. Red wine was swapped for Martinelli's apple cider. The holidays found a new rhythm. And guess what? I loved it! No pressure. No stress. Just cooking vegan food and relaxing with my daughter. We could do whatever we wanted. Listen to music. Watch movies. Take naps. Woosah! Holiday 5.0 was The Pivot—and surprisingly refreshing. One year, we drove to Miami and dined out on Christmas Day. That was unheard of in my family. In my early years, we didn't leave the house on Christmas Day unless Dad had to make an emergency run for a missing ingredient.

Then my dog, Digby, died.

And Dad got sick.

Life became complete chaos.

Then Dad was gone, too.

Having no parents was a tough pill to swallow. Losing Mom was awful, but losing Dad put the last nail in the coffin. I was really alone.

Life continued, and so did the holidays. My daughter was in college, and I downsized my home—first in a Smyrna apartment, then with family in Florida. Some years, my daughter came home from school and other years, I traveled to her. Holiday 6.0 was Untethered. We tested our resilience, patience and flexibility. We realized “home” was whenever we were together.

Now I live in a new home with my now-adult daughter, my dog, Cooper, and my grandbunny, Cocoa. Holiday 7.0 feels gentle, much like 5.0 did, but this time with the acceptance that comes when your parents have been gone for many years. I call this version “Rooted.” I now hold the quiet authority my parents once held, creating the warmth and traditions that anchor our family.

Holidays come and go, and so do our loved ones. There's no guarantee that everyone gathered around the table this year will be here next year. Time is precious.

Now, when my friends tell me they are exhausted, with lots of events, shopping, planning and showing up, I breathe a sigh of remembrance. My holidays are relaxing and refreshing, surrounded by my little family. I've experienced big holidays and small, and I've enjoyed all of them, even the difficult ones. Learning to be grateful in the moment is the biggest gift of all. 🌱



Trish Ahjel Roberts is a transformational coach, wellbeing strategist, retreat leader and author of four books, including her latest, *The Anger Myth:*

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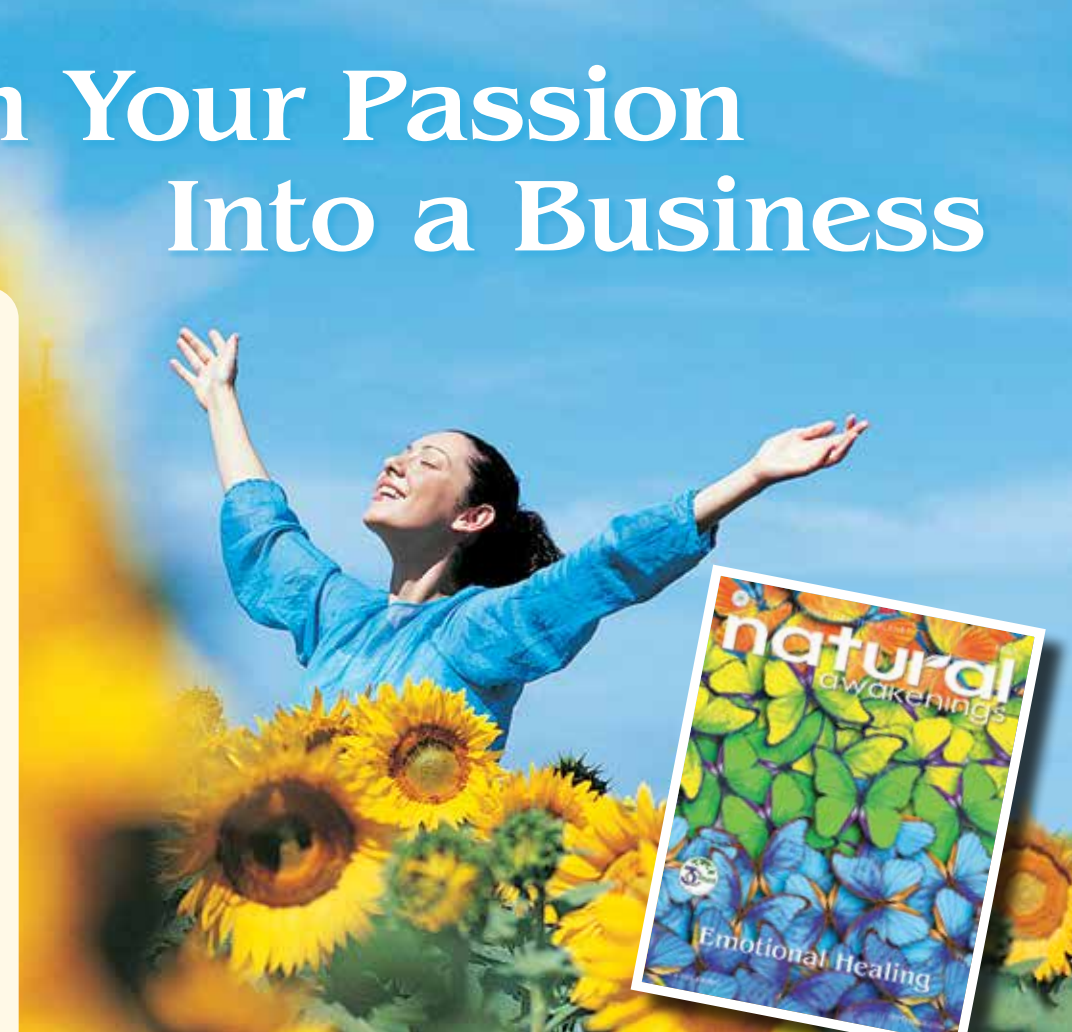
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