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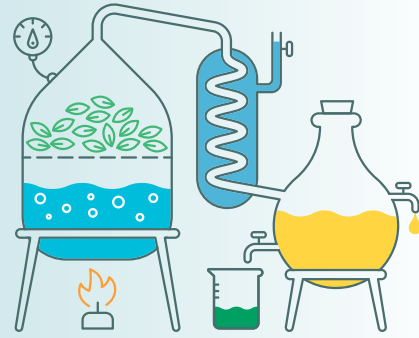


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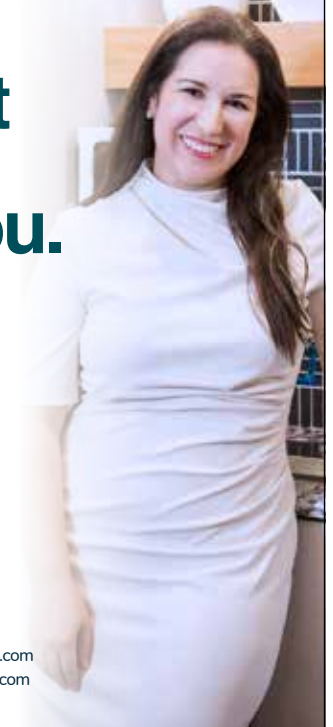


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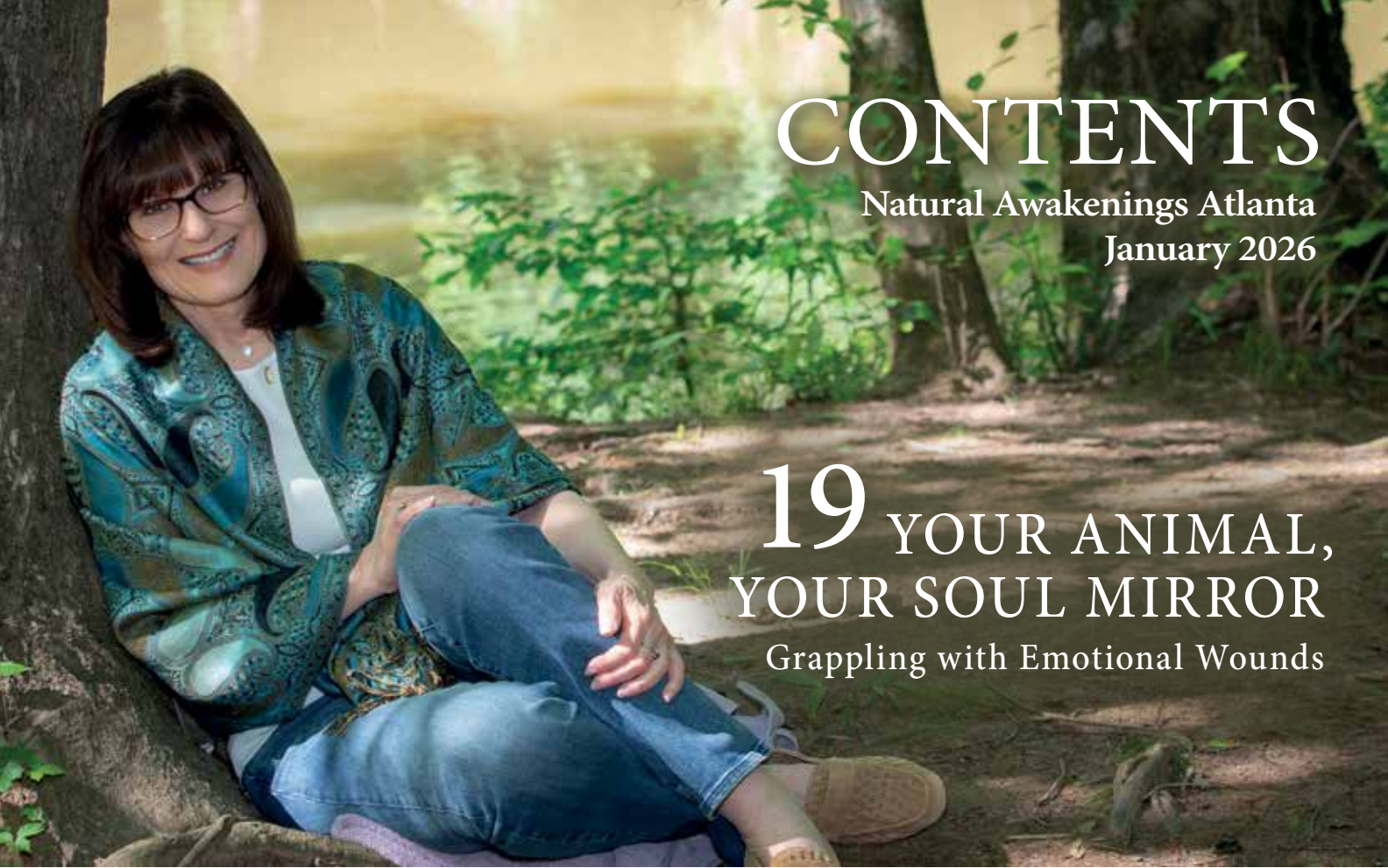
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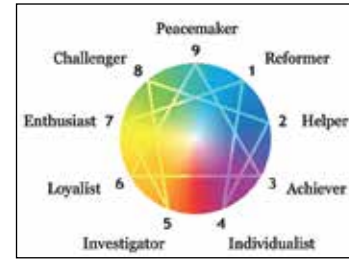
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Publisher's Letter



Another Year, Another Evolution

Natural Awakenings is Atlanta's only magazine focused on holistic health and personal evolution. But what do I mean by "personal evolution"?

Personal evolution isn't self-improvement. Self-improvement is about *doing*; personal evolution is about *being*. Gaining new knowledge, work skills, hobbies and improving one's health are avenues of self-improvement. Being able to do more, do better and do faster are the end results of self-improvement, and most self-improvement work is externally-oriented in nature.

Personal evolution is inner work, what Google's Gemini describes as "the deep, conscious process of looking inward to understand your thoughts, emotions, patterns and beliefs ... to achieve self-awareness, healing and personal growth, often involving practices like journaling, mindfulness and shadow work." Gemini also lists meditation, breathwork, visualization, therapy, coaching and dream analysis as other inner-work practices. One thing that I see as a primary vehicle that Google *doesn't* list: spiritual development.

My definition would also add more explicit goals: to grow one's capacity for unconditional love and unbounded compassion; to increase wisdom; to deepen one's sense of connectedness to all things, including Source/Infinite Intelligence/God; and to clarify and solidify one's path in life so that working on one's unique contribution to the world becomes more focused, assured and intense.

We've published a lot on personal evolution in this magazine, including articles on

life coaching, health coaching, breathwork, non-violent communications, the Enneagram, spirituality, retreats and healing the trauma of slavery. See our Online Table of Contents on page five for links to some of these past works.

Yet we haven't spent much copy on the topic of therapy, but our lead article this month—my interview with author and energy healer Tammy Billups—points to it. While the article isn't about therapy, it does explore the five main emotional wounds that humans and animals manifest and need to address if they are to heal and grow into their best selves. Billups' book, *Your Animal – Your Soul Mirror: Healing the Emotional Wounds of Animals and Their People*, is a deep dive into the five wounds and how individuals can heal from them, whether they have animal companions or not.

Also in this Issue

Also in this issue, we revive our coaching column, renamed from Ask a Coach to Coaching Corner. Columnist Linda Minnick, life coach and PSYCH-K facilitator, starts a 12-article stint with us, which we will publish every other month. This month's piece, "How to Move Your Life Forward in 2026," contains dozens of hints on how to incrementally improve in the coming year.

In addition, another article in our Personal Evolution department this month is the second in a three-part series on death and dying. Staff writer Noah Chen takes a look at death doulas and conscious dying coaches and explains how they help people in the final weeks and months of their lives.

I found some startling information in that piece. Susan Patterson, a conscious dying coach, runs discussion groups on preparing for the end. She tells of people in their 30s attending. How wonderful! Knowing deep in one's heart that their time is short and limited, even if they're relatively young, is the most surefire way to lead a meaningful life.

For all this talk of personal evolution and inner work, is it something you really need to do? To that question, Taylor Elyse Morrison, author of *Inner Workout*, asks: "Are you a human being?"

Morrison defines inner work as "the work you do to become more of who you already are," which, she points out, mirrors Carl Jung's adage: "The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are." Morrison provides four signs that point to the need for inner work:

- You struggle to hear your inner voice even as you're consuming a lot of content that should theoretically be helping
- You feel yourself changing the way you show up to make yourself more palatable for others
- You regularly doubt yourself
- You struggle to answer the question "What do you want?"

I find these to be insightful observations. Based on this list, I suspect that at least 95 percent of us need more inner work. And a useful way to start is with what is in your hands right now; reading this month's magazine may stimulate useful thinking!

Happy New Year, dear readers. Remember, everything you encounter this year is a gift—some gifts are just wrapped more nicely than others. 🙏



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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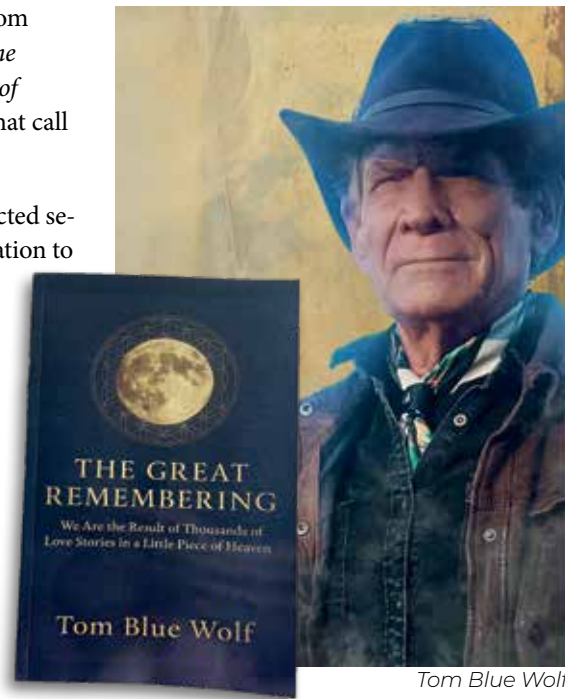
Blue Wolf Releases “The Great Remembering”

Storyteller, elder and director of the nonprofit organization, Earthkeepers & Co., Tom Blue Wolf recently released what he calls a “deeply personal and ancestral work,” *The Great Remembering: We Are the Result of Thousands of Love Stories in a Little Piece of Heaven*. He describes it as being “woven from the old stories, dreams and visions that call us back to our sacred connection with the earth and each other.”

Blue Wolf’s grandfather gifted him with many stories and teachings, and an unexpected series of events inspired him to share them now in these difficult times. “[It’s] an invitation to alter the global human narrative—which is sad at this point,” he says. Having done a lot of work in Africa, Europe and South America, he feels that “the whole global narrative right now is unsavory. It’s mean and nasty and separatist” and in need of transformation.

“The world is perfect; there’s just a lot of people having a bad conversation,” says Blue Wolf. “Conversation is the magical energy that creates the future we’re going to live into. So you have to be careful what you talk about, because it becomes your destiny.” The stories he tells are designed to inspire people to understand that it’s better to be kind than it is to be right.

The Great Remembering is available on Amazon and other booksellers. For more information, email bluewolf@earthkeepers.net or visit EarthKeepers.net.



Tom Blue Wolf

Featured Artists, Call to Artists in January and February

Karen Thompson Explores Dreams Through Art



She Carries Her Dreams by Karen Thompson

The work of returning artist Karen Thompson will be on exhibit at The Well of Roswell from December 13 through March 14.

With acrylics, oils and watercolor, Thompson’s works tend to be feminine-based, dream-like and often whimsical. Her most recent work features dreamwork as a creative and spiritual practice.

Thompson has won multiple awards in exhibitions around the Atlanta area. She has studied dreamwork for more than two years and paints her dreams to uncover their meaning and messages. She is also a member of the Jung Society of Atlanta, an International Dream Lodge member and a certified intentional creativity teacher. In addition, she teaches art programs in senior and mental health communities.

“Karen looks for the sacredness in ordinary moments,” says Becky Arrington, co-owner of The Well of Roswell. “Her spiritual practice happens when she’s working on the canvas, tuning in and asking, ‘What wants to happen?’”

The artist reception will take place on January 18 from 2 to 4 p.m. The exhibit is free, and paintings will be available for purchase.

For more information, call 770-640-9111 or visit TheWellOfRoswell.com. The Well of Roswell is located at 900 Old Roswell Lakes Parkway, Suite 300, in Roswell.

Phoenix & Dragon Showcases Two Emerging Artists



Recordings by Abigail Carawan

Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore announces two solo gallery exhibitions featuring emerging artists Abigail Carawan in January and Allyson Cheshire in February.

Carawan’s exhibition, *Polychrome*, runs January 2 through January 29 and highlights her work as an abstract realist exploring the human form, urban life and architectural repetition. Carawan blends classical painting techniques with bold color and perspective distortion. Her work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary

Art of Georgia and the Marietta Cobb Museum of Art.

Cheshire’s solo exhibition runs February 1 through February 29 at Phoenix & Dragon. A recent Kennesaw State University graduate, Cheshire works in realism with a focus on technical precision, subdued palettes and figure-driven narratives. Her work explores emotional tension between modern and traditional aesthetics and has been shown at Gallery 100 and

Mable House Arts Center. Her most recent achievement includes a published screen print for Justseeds’ “Celebrate People’s History” poster series.

Both artists were selected after participating in Phoenix & Dragon’s annual group shows. “I’ve had the pleasure of watching their skills develop over the past several years,” says curator Rachel Mara, citing their professionalism and quality of work. Admission to both exhibitions is free.

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

Heart Soul & Art Issues Call for Artists

Heart Soul & Art is calling upon local artists to submit entries for an upcoming juried exhibition entitled “Red: The Art of Passion, Power & Purpose,” celebrating the emotional intensity of the color red. “We are always excited to provide a community art exhibit for established and emerging artists,” says owner Sharron Regan.

The call for artists opened December 15, and the submission deadline is January 25. Artists may submit up to three pieces for a fee of \$45 through the Heart Soul & Art website. Accepted mediums include acrylic, oils, mixed media, digital creations, pastels, pen and ink and drawing. Submissions must either feature red as the dominant color or use red intentionally as a focal point. The exhibition invites both abstract and representational work and encourages interpretations ranging from subtle to bold.

Winners will be announced at the reception for the exhibit on February 7 from 4 to 5:30 p.m. The juried show awards \$500 in cash prizes, including first, second, third and Best of Show.

For more information, call 770-485-5930 or visit HeartSoulAndArt.com. Heart Soul & Art is located at 1470 Roswell Road in Marietta.

Advanced Wellness Welcomes New Chiropractor

Advanced Wellness of Atlanta has added Dr. Tracey Huffman to its team of practitioners and is expanding the clinic’s availability with Saturday appointments.

Huffman specializes in care of the nervous system and is trained in Applied Chiroplus Kinesiology, Network Spinal Analysis, functional medicine, Neuroemotional Technique (NET) and advanced gentle adjusting techniques. She is also a certified Inner Matrix Systems Trainer. Her path into chiropractic care began in 2011 after being diagnosed with a chronic neurological condition, followed by her first chiropractic adjustment a year later. She later earned her Doctor of Chiropractic degree from Life University in 2022 and continues her personal healing journey through mindful movement, meditation and food choices.

Dr. Karen Tedeschi, the owner of Advanced Wellness of Atlanta, says the team has long awaited the right practitioner. “For a number of years, my goal had been to invite another seasoned chiropractor to join our team,” Tedeschi says. “Not just any chiropractor, but one who has the passion and the skills needed.”

Huffman offers appointments Monday, Thursday and Saturday. Call for new patient special and appointment pricing.

For more information, call 404-320-0204 or visit AdvancedWellnessAtl.com. Advanced Wellness of Atlanta is located at 1549 Clairmont Rd. Suite 105 in Decatur.



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Soulful Sourdough

Why This Bread Still Heals

by Maya Whitman



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Sourdough, made from flour, water, salt and starter, is the oldest form of leavened bread, originating with the ancient Egyptians. Unlike most yeast breads, sourdough has a low glycemic index and does not spike blood sugar levels. A 2024 study in *Foods* highlights its benefits compared to other types of bread, including improved digestibility, high mineral and antioxidant content, better blood sugar control and improved dietary fiber composition, including prebiotics to feed healthy gut bacteria.

Artisans that master its versatility also find sourdough to be a source of emotional nourishment. “You hear the crust crackle as it cools, smell the warmth of grain and time, and know that something very old and very human has happened in your own kitchen,” says Lisa Robitaille, founder of Great Lakes Sourdough, in Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

With knowledge, a good starter and patience, sourdough can become a lifelong friend, offering more than just the iconic

crusty loaf. “The same living starter that makes a loaf rise can become the morning’s pancakes, the evening’s pizza or even a tray of chocolate chip cookies,” says Robitaille. “Once you understand how the culture behaves, you can shape it into nearly anything: soft rolls, bagels, waffles, muffins, even pastry.”

A Belly-Friendly Treat

While many yeast breads cause bloating and other gut discomforts, sourdough is gentler. According to the Mayo Clinic, regular consumption of sourdough can improve the intestinal microbiome. “During a long fermentation, the yeast and bacteria produce enzymes that help break down gluten and some carbohydrates and reduce phytic acid, a grain compound that can block mineral absorption. The result is a sourdough bread many people find easier to digest,” explains Katya Nikolov, a cancer research scientist and owner of Dubuque Bakery, in Snohomish, Washington. “My view is simple and science-first: When it is slowly fermented and made

with high-quality flour, sourdough can be a delicious, gut-friendly ally within a varied, balanced diet.”

According to Emily Harryman, owner of Plain Jane Bakes, in Keller, Texas, and author of the upcoming cookbook *Plain Jane Sourdough*, her customers with irritable bowel syndrome and gluten intolerance attest to sourdough’s superiority. “I had one customer in particular who relayed to me that my bread was the only bread she could eat,” Harryman boasts. “She took my sourdough class before she moved out of state so she could replicate it in her new home. It was such a blessing to her.”

Tips for Beginners

A sourdough starter is a live, active, fermented culture made from flour and water that acts as a leavening agent for baked goods, replacing commercial yeast and providing a signature tangy flavor. Sourdough starters vary greatly depending on water-to-flour ratios (from liquid to stiff), flavor profiles (from tangy to sour to slightly sweet) and flour types (from whole grain rye to whole wheat to unbleached all-purpose). The secret to sourdough success is letting nature take its course.

Fresh herbs, fruit, cheese, seeds or chocolate can be folded into the dough for a delicious taste experience, but behind every fresh-from-the-oven masterpiece is a good starter. Each one is unique, thanks to a mélange of elements. As Harryman explains, “When the wild yeasts from the starter mingle and consume the sugars in the flour, carbon dioxide gas is released. The dough’s gluten network traps the gas, causing the dough to rise, yielding sourdough’s renowned, airy crumb.”

“Sourdough bread baking isn’t just following a recipe; it’s understanding the living system in your bowl and a constant response to a changing environment like temperature, season, humidity and flour,” says Nikolov, who recommends using a scale, keeping notes and aiming for steady, comfortable temperatures between 72°

and 78° F for both the starter and dough. She generally prefers clean, non-processed, organic whole-grain flours milled directly from the grain, as well as ancient wheats like einkorn and spelt.

For reliability and depth of flavor, Harryman suggests acquiring a mature starter fed with organic flour, ideally dark rye. This can be accomplished by connecting with a local sourdough baker or ordering a well-reviewed, dehydrated sourdough starter. “They are fairly easy to revive, and some are nearly 100 years old in maturity,” she explains. For a gluten-free option, she recommends building a starter from scratch to be sure of its purity.

Robitaille underscores the importance of time, grain and imagination for flavor. “Red Fife [a North American heirloom wheat variety] brings a quiet sweetness; rye adds depth and spice; and whole wheat speaks of the harvest field,” she explains. In a busy world, baking bread can be a grounding, meditative act that also nourishes family and friends. “There is a kind of stillness in the act of baking that feels sacred. You watch a living culture transform simple ingredients into sustenance,” she muses. “That, to me, is magic.” 🍞

Maya Whitman is a frequent writer for Natural Awakenings.



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EVERYDAY SOURDOUGH LOAF WITH HONEY



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After the fourth set of stretch-and-folds, cover the dough with a linen cloth or towel and allow it to ferment at room temperature. Let the dough proof (rise until the needed bulk is complete) approximately 5 hours, but the time may vary. Watch the dough, not the clock, looking for a noticeable rise of about 60 to 75 percent, a slightly domed surface, bubbles on the surface and an airy feel with a gentle jiggle.

Once the dough has proofed, lightly dust the counter with rice flour. Turn out the dough onto a clean work surface and shape it into a ball by hand—this is called a pre-shape. Let it rest for 20 to 30 minutes on the counter uncovered.

YIELD: 1 LOAF

3 cups white-bread or all-purpose flour

1 cup whole-wheat flour

1½ cup water

½ cup active sourdough starter

¾ Tbsp honey

1¾ tsp salt

Rice flour for dusting

Combine all ingredients except the rice flour in a bowl or stand mixer. Mix just until no dry flour remains and the dough is cohesive. The bulk fermentation process begins as soon as the starter is mixed with the other ingredients, which means that the dough will rise and grow in size while it ferments. Cover the dough with a damp linen kitchen towel and let it rest for 30 minutes to an hour at 73° to 75° F room temperature.

Stretch and fold the dough as follows: With lightly wet fingertips, grab a portion of the dough and stretch it upward. Fold the dough over toward the center of the bowl. Give the bowl a quarter turn and repeat the stretch and fold. Continue to turn, stretch and fold until the circle is complete. Cover the dough and let it sit for 30 minutes. Repeat this stretch-and-fold process three more times, letting the dough rest for 30 minutes in between.

Shape the dough and place it seam-side up in a rice-flour dusted banneton (or extra-large bowl lined with a linen cloth). Let the shaped dough rest at room temperature for 1 hour to start fermentation before the cold proof.

To cold proof the dough, cover the loaf with a damp linen kitchen towel and refrigerate 12 to 16 hours.

Place an oven-safe cast iron Dutch oven with the lid onto the center rack of the oven. Preheat the oven to 480° F for 1 hour.

Invert the cold dough onto parchment paper, score the loaf, load it into the hot Dutch oven and cover it with the lid. Bake covered for 20 minutes to trap steam and drive dough expansion.

After 20 minutes, remove the lid, reduce the oven to 450° F and bake for an additional 15 to 20 minutes until the loaf is deep golden. It is ready when the internal temperature is 205° to 210° F.

Let the loaf cool for 1 to 2 hours before slicing, so that the crumb can set.

Recipe courtesy of Katya Nikolov of Dubuque Bakery.



The Giving Season Gallery

Natural Awakenings includes January as part of the "Giving Season." After the burst of giving to others in November and December, women would benefit from slowing down and caring for themselves.

Fortunately, most women understand the importance of self-care. A Morning Consult survey of 2,000 women found that 89% perform at least one self-care practice and that 94% incorporate at least one healthy habit daily.

While we can debate what constitutes self-care, it's likely that all of us could use more of it. Check out what some Atlanta retailers and service providers have to offer and discover what calls to you!

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The Power of Integrative Medicine

A Guide to Whole-Person Care

by Hannah Tytus



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As interest in health and wellness grows, more people are seeking medical models that go beyond symptom treatment and disease management. Integrative medicine has emerged as one such approach, blending conventional and complementary methods to address the health of the whole person. An integrative health approach offers a practical, evidence-informed framework for personalized care. Its focus is shifting the conversation to prevention by cultivating holistic health that goes beyond the absence of disease.

Defining Integrative Medicine

The Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine & Health defines integrative medicine as a philosophy that emphasizes the practitioner-patient relationship, focuses on the whole person, is evidence based and draws on all appropriate therapies and lifestyle approaches that promote optimal health and healing.

Brent Bauer, M.D., a professor of medicine and the research chair for Mayo Clinic Integrative Medicine and Health, describes it as “bringing the best of both conventional and evidence-based complementary therapies together to optimally meet the needs of the patient. We simply ask, what is the best therapy for the individual patient? That gets us back to what I would think of as plain old good medicine.”

On an integrative health team, medical doctors may work alongside acupuncturists, naturopaths, herbalists, chiropractors, massage therapists or any number of specialized practitioners. “Integrative medicine is taking the best of what we call Western medicine and integrating it into what is practiced in other parts of the world to create a health plan where the patient is the focus,” says Hakima Amri, Ph.D., co-director of the integrative medicine and health sciences program at Georgetown University. These other medicine systems include Traditional Chinese Medicine, Indian Ayurveda, Unani-Tibb medicine, homeopathy and others.

The Whole-Person Mindset

Integrative medicine is about viewing patients holistically, considering all parts of their humanity. Rather than examining organs or systems in isolation, practitioners evaluate the multitude of factors that influence illness or well-being. It emphasizes disease prevention, resilience building and health restoration throughout the lifespan. “We bring a whole team of practitioners to work with the patient, to look at the patient as a whole and not only treat symptoms, but to truly heal the patient,” explains Amri.

Whole-person health rests on five key principles: patient-centered, relationship-based care; personalized health plans; attention to physical, mental and spiritual well-being; prevention and self-responsibility; and collaboration across modalities and providers. It acknowledges the patient as being embedded in environmental, relational, emotional and spiritual contexts that each play a part.

Integrative Medicine in Practice

Bauer explains how an integrative approach might work for a surgery patient. “If they have pain, a conventional approach might include medications, physical therapy or perhaps an injection. As an integrative physician, I have an even larger toolkit with things such as acupuncture, tuina (a Chinese bodywork technique), massage, mind-body practices like yoga and meditation, herbs and supplements, and low-level laser therapy.”

As the medical doctor leading the team, Bauer confers with other in-house practitioners to build a customized care plan. This expanded toolkit gives him a better chance of finding a therapy that not only works for the patient but also fits their personal preferences to optimize their quality of life.

Why Whole-Person Health Matters

“Chronic conditions are the biggest plight to humanity today. People are living with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, allergies, irritable bowel disorders and more, often with multiple conditions at once,” says Amri. Chronic disease is now a leading health challenge in the United States, heavily impacting quality of life for many. One in four American adults lives with chronic pain. At the same time, the use of complementary and integrative approaches has risen sharply from 19.2 percent in 2002 to 36.7 percent in 2022, with increases in yoga and meditation leading the growth.

“I think integrative medicine is an excellent approach for any patient,” says Bauer. “But I think it really shines when it comes to patients with chronic disease. By definition, most chronic illnesses are ones that conventional medicine cannot cure.” At the Mayo Clinic, he sees firsthand how integrative approaches can transform lives. He often introduces mindfulness and biofeedback-based meditation to help patients manage stress.


Beyond symptom relief, Bauer emphasizes a comprehensive lifestyle framework rooted in integrative principles that include balanced nutrition, regular exercise, daily

mind-body practice, restorative sleep, strong social and spiritual connections, and time in nature, finding these evidence-based habits to be not only restorative, but profoundly transformative.

Communicating With Healthcare Providers


Although one-third of adults report using complementary and integrative medicine modalities, at least 42 percent of users do not disclose their integrative therapy usage to their doctor. This nondisclosure can be dangerous, as many integrative modalities can potentially interact with medications or chronic conditions.

Amri offers an example: “Ginkgo biloba is good for improving memory, but it is also a blood thinner. If someone is on prescription blood thinners, it could cause serious complications.” Many herbs and supplements can interact with prescription medications and preexisting conditions, so it is very important to establish an open and honest dialogue with healthcare providers.



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To facilitate good conversations, Amri advises patients to be open and well-prepared. She encourages patients to bring their research materials with them to their appointments: “Do your research ahead of time,” she says. “If there are papers or studies you find interesting, take them with you and share them with your doctor. Be prepared and explain why you want to try certain therapies.”

“Physicians can do their part by listening carefully and by honestly acknowledging where their knowledge base might be limited,” says Bauer. “This is a great time for them to reach out to their integrative medicine colleagues and have them provide guidance to help meet the patient’s needs with evidence-based approaches.”

Looking Ahead

Despite the growth in integrative medicine, key barriers remain. Bauer points to insurance as the biggest gap, explaining, “Very few of these evidence-based, helpful, cost-avoiding therapies are covered by payers. My hope is that we see that change significantly in the immediate future. In a five-to-ten-year time frame, I think we’ll simply drop all the labels and call it good medicine.”

Amri also sees the field evolving quickly. “We’ve been training a whole generation of researchers that look at things differently,” she remarks, adding that policy reform and adequate reimbursements are essential to making integrative care more accessible.

Integrative medicine brings together evidence, empathy and empowerment, uniting the best of conventional, traditional and complementary approaches. It emphasizes collaboration between patients and providers, shared responsibility for wellness and a comprehensive focus on the whole person. By bridging therapies, fostering dialogue and addressing chronic disease with both science and compassion, integrative care offers a hopeful path to redefining modern health. 🌿

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

Wise Words 

Your Animal, Your Soul Mirror

An Interview with Tammy Billups

by Paul Chen and Diane Eaton



Photo: Lorikay Photography

Woodstock-based author and energy healer Tammy Billups has released her fourth book about animal-human relationships, *Your Animal - Your Soul Mirror: Healing the Emotional Wounds of Animals and Their People*. Her previous books—*Soul Healing with Our Animal Companions*, *Animal Soul Contracts* and *Animal Wayshowers*—racked up one silver and two gold awards from the Coalition of Visionary Resources.

Billups is a certified Interface Therapist who started her healing work with humans, but because of her love for animals, she wondered if her talent and skills could be applied to animals as well. Not only could she, but through observation and experience, she discovered that people and the animals that come into their lives

are fated to come together and partner with each other to heal shared emotional wounds. In this interview, publisher Paul Chen talked with Billups about her latest release.

We’ve been conditioned to think trilogies are definitive, so after you finished your last book, I thought you’d completed your series perfectly. But now we have Your Animal - Your Soul Mirror! Please give us some context. What are you trying to do with this book?

My new book dives into the five emotional wound patterns that both humans and animals carry from past traumas or emotional woundings. While emotional wounds can arise from countless situations, they can all be understood within five primary

patterns: abandonment, betrayal, invasiveness, terror and detachment of self. During my Interface Therapist certification in the early 2000s, I studied these patterns deeply. Then, through my work with animals, I discovered they were using the same ones. And in close relationships, they almost always mirrored their person’s pattern.

I wrote a little about that in *Soul Healing with Our Animal Companions*, but that book came out seven years ago, and I’ve gathered so many more insights since then. I knew I’d eventually share them, and now I finally have.

I believe that once people understand how these patterns show up, whether in behaviors or physical issues, they’ll see it as the missing piece of the puzzle. And with that awareness, they can step into a new level of healing and peace with their animals.

My goal with *Your Animal* is to give readers knowledge and tools from a higher perspective to more easily embrace all of their negative emotions when they arise. By doing so, both they and their animal kin can release outdated protective patterns that block their higher path to wholeness. This opens the door to moving beyond habitual reactivity cycles and to stepping into grounded, conscious responses.

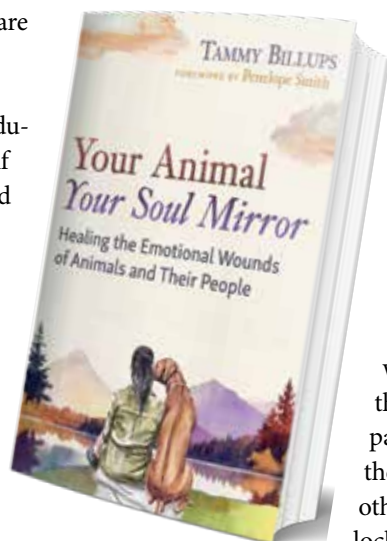
Since experts often define terms differently, I have to ask: How do you define “emotional healing”? Why is it important? And how does one accomplish it?

Most people discover their emotional wounding when they notice repetitive, undesired patterns in their lives or when they realize their emotions are behind certain physical issues. Sometimes it shows up as the sense that something is missing, and sometimes as a feeling of disconnection and not belonging. These trapped emotions stay in the body and subconscious mind until we—or our animals—find the inner strength to release them and remember our innate goodness, despite what we’ve endured.

That's what emotional healing is: becoming aware of and recovering from emotional wounds or trauma. It means recognizing unresolved pain, allowing yourself to feel and release it, and gradually revealing more of your authentic, truest self rather than living from reactive patterns created by unhealed wounds.

Both humans and domesticated animals form survival patterns to cope with painful circumstances and protect themselves from feeling their original wounds. At first, the patterns help them to get their needs met. But as they mature, they over-identify with the patterns and mistake them for who they are. In truth, those patterns block their truest selves. I think of them as having an expiration date; the longer we rely on them, the less effective they become, and the more they keep us from living fully.

My book provides clear practices and tools to identify and start unraveling survival patterns. Most people don't know how to begin, so the loving inner healing work gets sidelined. For many, the process feels intimidating and overwhelming, so they consciously or unconsciously avoid it. Others grow overly attached to their patterns or believe they don't deserve healing because of distorted beliefs rooted in early wounds. But healing doesn't have to be complicated; it's often simpler than people realize. For people to have more love, joy, ease, abundance and wellness in their lives,



they might want to consider prioritizing their emotional healing journey. It's the gateway to true freedom.

If the first part of emotional healing is recognizing that we have unresolved pain, what are the most effective methods available to release that pain?

Obviously, I'm a fan of energy work, but there are many other options. The key is to find a practitioner with whom all parts of you feel safe. You need to trust them to hold a sacred space to release the emotional pain behind the patterns of protection. Many psychotherapists now offer EMDR, Brain Spotting, EFT and other modalities to more easily release the traumas locked in the energy field and psyche. Meditating with the intention to work with your light team to help you raise your energetic vibration can often help to take a deeper dive into your inner healing.

Your Animal - Your Soul Mirror strikes me as a very solid guidebook/workbook for addressing much of what people see therapists for. It doesn't, of course, negate the need for therapists, but it does strike me as being very helpful on a wide range of issues that therapy addresses. Moreover, I sense that people could benefit quite a bit from your book, whether or not they have an animal. Please speak to these two ideas. Can it serve as a primer and guide for therapeutic

The Five Emotional Wounds: An Overview

	THE SCARED ONE	THE NEEDY ONE	THE SENSITIVE ONE	THE PROTECTOR	THE PERFECT ONE
ORIGIN OF EMOTIONAL WOUND	Experienced terror	Experienced abandonment	Experienced invasiveness	Experienced betrayal	Detached from authentic self
FEARS	Being in the physical world, being in a body	Being rejected, not getting basic needs met	Being controlled or humiliated	Trusting others, submitting to others	Being imperfect, surrendering into their emotions
DISTORTED BELIEFS	It is not safe to be here; I don't matter	I am unlovable; I'm not enough	I don't have any rights; I'm a failure	I am bad; I must be in control	I must be perfect; I must be correct
THE HEALING NEED	To surrender into living	To fill, nurture, and love the self	To feel empowered and express self	To trust others and self	To connect with true essence of self

Source: Your Animal - Your Soul Mirror: Healing the Emotional Wounds of Animals and Their People. © 2025 Tammy Billups. Chart by Natural Awakenings.

self-practice? And is it an "animal optional" offering?

Oh, how wonderful to hear you got that from reading the book. My hope is that it truly offers the resources people need to feel more comfortable taking a deeper dive into their unreleased shadow parts. While the book is animal-optional, I also want animal guardians to recognize that when they themselves begin to feel better, their animals will naturally mirror that healing back to them.

In the book, I include charts that outline each of the five emotional wound patterns. They cover not only the origins and overviews of the patterns, but also the potential characteristics, the physical and psychological issues that may arise, and a wealth of practices, tools and healing guidance for both the person and the animal. I also offer suggestions for types of practitioners who might provide additional support, depending on which emotional wound pattern is most used by the individual.

My sense is that the readers who will most appreciate and benefit from this book are those who love animals, whether or not they currently share life with an animal companion. At the same time, the practices and insights can be applied just as meaningfully by people who don't feel drawn to emotional closeness with animals. The core teachings are universal.

Among your women clients, is there one core wound that is far more prevalent among women than the others? I ask because 80 percent of our readers are women.

Well, the women I work with are mostly animal lovers, and those who contact me for healing sessions tend to mirror their animals' emotional wounding and in general, tend to have more invasiveness, more abandonment and more trauma in their backgrounds. Those with these three emotional wound patterns tend to have more empathy and want those in their wake to feel safe, accepted and not judged.

Continued on page 29

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Finding Peace at the End of Life with Doulas and Coaches

by Noah Chen

This is the second in our three-part series on matters of conscious death and dying. Read the first article here: bit.ly/sadhguru-1125

The United States has a fascinating—some might say “distant”—relationship with death. Yet, while some find the subject uncomfortable, a growing number of people are now planning for their end of life.

A 2013 Pew Research Center report found that while one-sixth of adults documented their wishes for end-of-life decisions in 1990, a full third of U.S. adults had done so in 2025.

Hand in hand with that statistic, many look for professionals to help them die with grace and dignity and without regrets. Enter the death doulas and conscious dying coaches—professionals trained to help people better prepare for and navigate the often complicated, painful and spiritually challenging task of dying. The work of the two professions overlaps in several areas, as each offers companionship for the final journey.

Death Doulas

“End-of-life” or “death” doulas often provide holistic, hands-on support for someone who is dying or who has received a terminal diagnosis. Pamela Carter, the executive director of the International Doula Life Movement from 2020 to 2025,

has more than 45 years of experience as a death doula. She’s often engaged either by someone who is dying or a family member a month or two before their passing, and she is often in the room at the time of passing as well.



Pamela Carter

For her, the work is about helping someone with their spiritual preparation and their connection to those around them.

“You have to plan for your end of life, and in planning ... you talk about what is important to you, not just medically, but

spiritually and emotionally. Who do you want with you when you die?” says Carter.

She also helps the family navigate the complicated U.S. health care industry.

The U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services spent \$23.9 billion for hospice care in 2022, according to their reporting, a figure that is expected to more than double by 2032. For families with a loved one nearing the end of life, navigating this system can be especially stressful, and it can help to have



Susan Patterson

“I’ve had people from their 30s to their 80s participating in these programs,” said Patterson. “I think there are seasons in life when we feel compelled to ask ourselves big questions, some of which are spawned by things that are happening in our lives.”

a knowledgeable and empathetic guide to turn to.

Carter describes the role of the doula to be an advocate for the dying first and foremost. “My sole purpose is to make sure that they are getting what they want [and] that they are being treated ... the way they would choose to be treated,” she says.

Carter says, “I do it all. When I arrive, the families ask me, ‘What are you going to do?’ And I say to them, ‘Tell me what you need.’”

Conscious Dying Coaches

Conscious dying coaches, on the other hand, frequently focus on spiritual preparation and reconciliation before death is imminent, often working with clients who haven’t received a terminal diagnosis. Susan Patterson, a conscious dying coach and the founder of Gifts from the End Coaching in Atlanta, runs preparatory discussion groups for people interested in discussing and preparing for their eventual end.

Patterson said that one of her group participants is a woman in her early 30s who recently became a mother. Her newfound responsibility brought new anxieties about death, along with questions about what would happen to her newborn child should she pass. Another woman who was much older began attending the group when her husband received a terminal diagnosis.

Patterson offers a course in which she uses rituals and reflections to help participants examine their lives through the lens of their own mortality. This preparatory model comes from the Conscious Dying Institute, an organization that trains coaches. Their practice, “The Art of Conscious Dying,” guides people to prioritize what matters most if they had only three days or three months to live and covers topics around emotional and spiritual well-being as well as legacy wishes.

One of the practices in Patterson’s course includes a shared ceramic bowl placed in the center of a discussion circle. “It becomes a focal point ... to speak to the bowl. If you’re feeling really tender about sharing things ... you can offer it to the bowl, and the bowl will hold it,” Patterson explains.

According to Patterson, this preparatory work has become very important for Americans because over the past hundred

years, the death experience has shifted from a “family event” to one overseen by medical institutions. While she clarifies that modern medical advancements are absolutely beneficial, they have made many Americans view death as a purely medical issue and something to be simply handed over to doctors and hospices.

“When is it not a medical issue anymore? And when is it more of a psycho-spiritual event of realizing that this body is not going to be cured? That’s the part that’s really hard for us now,” says Patterson. And that is one of the parts coaches and doulas work to make easier.

Spirituality and Dying Without Regret

Doulas and coaches can provide two types of service: practical and spiritual. Carter estimates that 85 percent of her work is spiritual, often involving helping individuals reframe their life narratives as they approach death. A large part of the process involves addressing the regrets of the dying and helping them recognize their own value. This often involves sitting with clients and providing space for them to disclose deep regrets that have weighed on them for many years.

She recalls one client—a mother who always wanted to travel the world, but never

did. “I drew the conversation back to the successes they’ve had in [their lives],” she says. She helped them realize that traveling was ultimately less important and fulfilling than building their life with their family. “That’s something they held on to, but they lost sight of the fact that what they have done has been tremendous.”


In another instance, Carter recalls a man dying of pancreatic cancer who asked her, “Pam, do you think God’s through with me?” In response, she reframed his journey as a transition. “No, God’s never through with us. You may have completed your journey here, but your journey is not over,” she told him. After their conversation, he said, “I’ve never thought of it this way... I think I’m looking forward to dying now.”

A Family Affair

The work with the dying often involves helping them forge new ground in their relationships with their families. Carter recounts working with a veteran in his 80s who kept his background as an interpreter in the army who helped people escape the Iron Curtain a secret, feeling they wouldn’t be interested. But upon learning his history, Carter encouraged the man to share his medals and stories with his sons, both of whom were in the military. “Seeing their reception of taking [the medals] from him, the pride that they had in

**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

that—he would have missed that totally,” notes Carter.

Help with forgiveness also plays a big role in a doula’s spiritual work. “When people talk about forgiveness, they fail to recognize that the person you have to forgive is yourself ... I have to forgive myself ... in order to free myself of that hurt,” Carter explains. It might mean forgiving oneself for certain actions or behaviors that affected their families, or it might have to do with failing to accomplish goals they held dear. While reconciliation is nice, it is often out of the control of the dying, as the other party might not be ready, able or present for it.



Tarron Estes

Unfortunately, Carter says that some family members don’t prioritize the dying person’s emotional well-being, and she often has to help family members navigate difficult or emotionally taxing conversations. In one instance, she shepherded a young heiress from the room when the heiress repeatedly, and within earshot of the dying, asked how much money they would receive in the will.

By spending time working on their relationships with their family members, doulas and coaches are not only able to help clients die with more peace, they can leave families with a greater sense of connection and appreciation for their departed.

The Practical Scaffolding

While her spiritual work is often the reason people hire Carter, what she offers also comes within a framework of practical support. When people call her, they’ve often been overwhelmed after receiving a list of hospice providers and specialists, and one of the first things they tell her is, “I don’t know what to do.” An experienced doula can help them make sense of their options from a practical perspective.

“A lot of people are the sole caregivers for a family member ... and they get really

exhausted,” says Tarron Estes, a conscious dying coach and founder of the Conscious Dying Institute in Boulder, Colorado. “A lot of people go through struggles with family members who are divided on ... their agreement around what to do with their family member’s finances or ... where they’re going to live out their lives,” says Estes. “They have trouble making decisions around that, and often the family members get really frustrated with each other and need coaching and counseling around that.”

Estes insists on correcting the misconception that doulas and coaches are involved with the drafting or distribution of the will. In fact, they are not. However, discussions with a coach can include topics such as funeral arrangements and different methods of laying a body to rest.

Creating a “healing environment” is another practical yet spiritually significant intervention. “We can help them bring pictures of their loved ones into the room ... helping them just put [essential oils] on their forehead ... bringing the music in that they love,” Estes says. This helps shift what can be a clinical or overwhelming space into something that can facilitate spiritual growth and connection at the end of one’s life.

Perhaps one of the most valuable practical supports is simply the doula’s presence as they fill in gaps in care. Some doulas can stay overnight when family members are exhausted or mediate difficult family dynamics at the bedside—although this is entirely dependent on one’s relationship with their doula.

Estes says that the practical considerations are often, on the surface, why she is hired, while the deeper reasons are often spiritual. Decisions that seem practical—like what hospice service they want to use—

can quickly lead to emotional and spiritual deliberations about end-of-life wishes and debates around length of life versus quality. And these are what coaches and doulas are trained to facilitate and guide.

Enabling a Peaceful Letting Go

Ultimately, whether in the preparatory phase, a practical planning session, or the final vigil, the work of doulas and conscious dying coaches converges on a single purpose: enabling individuals to die with a sense of peace and completion.

“Our job as an end-of-life doula is to be able to answer the questions that most people have no idea [how to answer],” says Carter.

However, Patterson makes it clear that life, in many ways, is the most important part of death. When asked what a good death looks like, she had this to say:

“I’m not totally in favor of the term “a good death” ... I think I’m going to get what I get, so I don’t want to impose expectations on what I’m going to get when I die. However, I think that my willingness to engage myself—to deeply think about the fact that I am going to die—enables me to release the hard grip on life that’s easy to have, and so I think it enables me to live in a more compassionate way ... I think the things that I’m learning about how to live my life are going to serve me as I’m dying, I feel a real connection with other people, not just those that I love, but perfect strangers that I didn’t feel before.”

If we can be honest with ourselves and genuinely connect to those around us in life, says Patterson, then perhaps, just as Carter’s client was able to do, we, too, can one day look forward to dying. 🌱



Noah Chen is a writer and journalist who covers health, culture and media. He splits his time between New York City and Atlanta. He’s probably working out

of a coffee shop right now.

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How to Move Your Life Forward in 2026



merekuliasz/Getty Images via Canva Pro

Every new year brings its own sense of possibility, but 2026 feels different. Life is moving quickly—technology is changing how we work and connect, shifting our routines, and many people are looking for stability, meaning and a fresh start. If you're hoping to move your life forward this year, you're not alone. The good news is that progress doesn't always require sweeping changes. Often, it's the small, thoughtful shifts that make the biggest difference.

Here are practical, encouraging ways to create momentum in 2026—approaches that feel realistic, human and grounded in everyday life.

1 Start with goals you can see yourself doing

A lot of people set goals out of pressure or habit and then wonder why they lose steam. This year, try something different: set goals that are clear, doable, and meaningful to *you*.

Instead of deciding to “get healthier,” try:

- “Take a 20-minute walk after work.”
- “Cook dinner at home three nights a week.”

Instead of setting a goal to “save money,” try:

- “Put aside \$50 from every paycheck.”

When your goals are specific, you're more likely to reach them because you know exactly what to aim for. And when they match your real life, your schedule, your energy and your values, they become easier to stick with.

2 Build gentle systems that support you

You might have experienced this before: Motivation gets you started, but routines keep you going. The trick is to build systems that feel supportive yet aren't too strict or overwhelming.

Consider simple tools like:

- Setting a morning routine that gives you a calm start

- Grouping small habits together, such as doing some stretches right after you brush your teeth
- Blocking out time to focus on important tasks
- Using reminders or checklists to keep yourself organized

Systems help you stay consistent even on days when motivation is nowhere to be found. And consistency is where real progress happens.

3 Invest time in the relationships that matter most

No matter how many personal goals you set, the people around you play a huge role in how you feel and how far you move forward. This year, focus on the relationships that lift you, bring out your best and make you feel understood.

That could mean:

- Calling a friend you haven't talked to in a while
- Spending more quality time with family
- Setting boundaries with people who drain you
- Surrounding yourself with encouraging, growth-minded individuals

Healthy relationships give you emotional fuel. When you feel supported, everything else becomes easier.

4 Strengthen your financial foundation one step at a time

Money can create stress or freedom depending on how it's managed. The key to moving forward financially in 2026 is consistency—not perfection.

Try focusing on:

- Creating a simple budget you can actually follow
- Paying down debt little by little
- Setting up automatic savings, even if the amount is small
- Reviewing subscriptions, bills and insurance to reduce costs

Every small financial decision moves you toward stability. And stability creates room for growth.

5 Take care of your body and mind

It's very hard to make progress when you're exhausted, overwhelmed or running on empty. This year, prioritize your well-being—not out of pressure, but because you deserve to feel good in your daily life.

Some helpful habits include:

- Getting consistent, quality sleep
- Moving your body in ways you enjoy
- Eating balanced meals and staying hydrated
- Setting aside quiet time to decompress
- Practicing stress relief, such as journaling or deep breathing

When you feel balanced, you think more clearly, make better decisions and handle challenges with more resilience.

6 Simplify your space and your schedule

Clutter—whether it's physical or mental—can quietly slow you down. Simplifying makes room for clarity, focus and new possibilities.

You might try:

- Decluttering one drawer, closet or room at a time
- Cleaning up digital clutter, such as emails, photos or files
- Saying “no” to commitments that drain your time and energy
- Creating simple systems for chores and responsibilities

Often, clearing space in your environment leads to clearing space in your mind.

7 Learn skills that open new doors

The world is changing fast, and learning new skills is one of the most empowering things you can do. But skill-building doesn't have to feel like homework. Choose areas that genuinely interest you or support your goals.

Some high-impact skills for 2026 include:

- Getting comfortable with AI and digital tools
- Strengthening communication and leadership abilities
- Learning to understand data and make informed decisions
- Developing creative or problem-solving skills

Start small. You might take a course, go through a tutorial or adopt a weekly practice session. Over time, these new skills can lead to new opportunities, both professionally and personally.

8 Use technology intentionally—not constantly

Technology in 2026 can make life easier, but only if you use it in a way that works for *you*. Instead of downloading every trendy app, choose a few tools that genuinely reduce stress and simplify your day.

For example, you might benefit from:

- An AI-driven planner that helps with scheduling
- A health tracker that monitors your sleep and activity
- A budgeting app that shows you your spending patterns
- A note-taking app that keeps your ideas organized

The goal isn't to become more digital; it's to make your life lighter and more manageable.

9 Be flexible when plans change, because they will

Life rarely goes according to plan. Instead of seeing unexpected changes as setbacks, try to treat them as part of the process. Flexibility is one of the most valuable skills you can develop in 2026.

This looks like:

- Adjusting your goals as circumstances shift
- Trying new approaches when something isn't working
- Releasing old habits or beliefs that no longer serve you
- Seeing challenges as learning opportunities rather than failures

Flexibility makes you more adaptive, less stressed and more open to unexpected opportunities.

10 Make reflection a habit

Reflection helps you understand what's working, what isn't and what needs to change. It turns experience into insight.

Each week or month, ask yourself:

- What made me proud?
- What challenged me?
- What habits helped me the most?
- What small change could make next week easier?

Reflection isn't about judging yourself; it's about learning from your life so you can grow with intention.

Final thoughts

Moving your life forward in 2026 doesn't require a huge transformation. It's about taking small steps consistently, making decisions with clarity and forming habits that support the person you want to become. Whether your goals are personal, professional, financial, or emotional, you can shape your momentum this year.

Focus on what matters, take care of yourself and allow room for flexibility. With steady effort and a thoughtful approach, 2026 can become a year of meaningful, noticeable progress—one where you truly move forward in a way that feels right for you. 🌱



Linda Minnick is a speaker, author, life coach and Preferred PSYCH-K facilitator. Her most recent book, *New Day, New Life*, is available on Amazon.



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bit.ly/aac-aging-gracefully-0525

Please share a story of how you helped a client feel and release an unresolved pain so we can give readers a taste of what they can expect from your book.

Sure. When my client Cathy called initially, she was concerned about a situation in which a cat she had adopted two years prior had been bullying her elder cat, Storm. Cathy was relating to Storm, who was experiencing the invasiveness, and she wanted to fix the "bully" cat.

As we got talking, it turned out that Cathy had experienced oodles of invasiveness from her very domineering father and from a sister who had emotionally tormented her on a consistent basis. After one or two sessions, the attacks from the newer cat completely stopped!

Then Cathy went on a deeper dive into healing her emotional wounds and had a miraculous, beautiful journey of strengthening her boundaries and releasing repressed anger and pain. She released others' emotions and pain as well, because when you have a lot of invasiveness, you're prone to absorbing others' energies around you, because your boundaries are so porous.

That's why it's important for people who have animals to look at the mirroring that's happening. Whatever is happening in their behaviors is almost always mirroring something for them that they're repressing. The animal helps them shed light on the healing that is needed for them to feel better, lighter and more empowered.

During Cathy's final session, she shared that she'd had a dream the night before where there was a child who was locked inside a cage. Suddenly, someone broke the lock and opened the door, and the child walked outside of the cage, took a deep breath, and from the depths of her soul roared like a lion. This symbolized Cathy's inner child being free to courageously step out of the bondage and pain of her past to embrace her authentic power. 🦁

BREAK FREE from unhealthy habits

Do you feel stuck and frustrated by brain fog, low energy, and stubborn weight that just won't budge? Are you overwhelmed by too much information and unsure where to start? You're not alone. The real issue isn't your willpower; it's finding a *sustainable* plan that works for *you*.



Hope Knosher is a certified health and wellness coach who has helped people just like you break free from unhealthy patterns.

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Working with Hope has been transformative. She helped me find my voice and strength to heal, teaching me to pause, accept my feelings, and respond thoughtfully rather than react. My relationships have improved, and I've become a better mother, daughter, and spouse. Even months after our session ended, I continue to grow, thanks to her guidance. Hope truly set me on a path to lasting change. ~Andrea B., coaching client



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- LINDA MINNICK

SCAN TO GET STARTED

Generated by Love

Yogic Service Projects in Greater Atlanta

by Patricia Schmidt

Anybody can serve ... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant. — Dr. Martin Luther King

Since 1983, Americans have honored Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a federal holiday, and it remains the only nationally-recognized holiday marked as a day of service—a day “on” rather than a day “off,” as civil rights leader John Lewis framed it. Dr. King is remembered for many contributions to America’s civic life, but his call for everyone to work with a servant’s heart to improve their own community remains one of his greatest legacies.

In tribute to Dr. King’s connection to Atlanta and to raise awareness of ongoing service opportunities throughout the city, we spotlight a few community projects running in and around the metro area, ones that are rooted in yoga and the yogic precepts of love, compassion and non-violence. These precepts were shared, espoused and elevated by Dr. King, and they live on in the community work of all who participate in these projects.



Victoria Ladd

The service organizations below are committed to an ethos of accessibility and adaptability; the directors emphasize flexibility and expertise as they and their teachers meet the highly specialized needs arising from working with vulnerable and youth populations. Sustaining economic support for the variety of forms of care they provide remains a chief challenge, as does sustaining the emotional support for those who provide those services. For example, teachers must embed themselves within these populations in order to be trusted care providers, and both teachers

and directors need ongoing support to keep showing up reliably.

All of these groups are united by their hope that their work and its benefits will be felt beyond the yoga class as they bring the positive effects of mindfulness, meditation and yoga postural practices into the communities they serve. Their service stands on the yoga precepts of *ahimsa*, or non-violence and non-harm, with the intention of breaking the cycles of community and generational violence. They are driven by *satya*, or truthfulness of approach, which acknowledges the challenges of the present moment, and *tapas*, the dedication and resilience of effort. Ultimately, each organization’s work asks that its service members remember the true Self, which is loved unconditionally.

As Victoria Ladd, founder of Be Tru Studios, says, “We look forward with optimism because service is not fragile when it is rooted in devotion, community, and compassionate presence—the same sustaining rhythm Dr. King honors in his sermon.



TLC at work in the community.

He reminds us that true greatness lives in servanthood, a concept echoed in the yogic principle of *seva*, or selfless, devotional service, offered without expectation of return. Our hope is that this work continues not just as a weekly offering, but a long-lasting ripple of healing that reaches generations to come, reshaping how people heal, connect and care for others.”

TLC Yoga in Metro Atlanta

Since 2020, TLC Yoga has served Atlantans experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Along with their partners, Eastside Church in East

Atlanta Village and Restoring One’s Hope in the Old Fourth Ward, TLC runs two community yoga programs for people who are unsheltered or in temporary living situations. Additionally, they offer two private yoga programs serving men in a downtown shelter and women in a recovery center.

The yoga is provided by founder Ashley Erwin and a few other established teachers. Each class is a mixture of accessible and trauma-informed chair and mat yoga, utilizing simple and safe postures known to relieve discomfort throughout the body. Meditation and breathwork help participants manage stress, while restorative yoga poses promote deep relaxation.

Each class is tailored to students’ needs on a particular day. TLC’s students are not yet in a position to practice elsewhere, and the goal is simple: to help them feel better in their bodies and for them to leave class in a better state than when they arrived. Erwin notes that the participants

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-Gabrielle, 200 YTT Graduate”

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are in the hardest times of their lives, and many are not accustomed to being cared for in this way. She sees the power in yoga to help everyone feel better in mind, body and spirit, no matter the adversity of their circumstances.

For donations and volunteer opportunities, including non-yoga service roles, ambassadorship and social media, visit TLCYoga.org.

Centering Youth in Metro Atlanta and throughout Georgia

For more than a decade, Centering Youth (CY) has offered yoga to young people and teenagers experiencing both short- and long-term incarceration in detention centers across Georgia. Founded by Veronica Lewinger, CY is a contractor with the Office of Behavioral Health Services, which is part of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Youth Detention Centers. It deploys a small team of experienced, rigorously-trained instructors to offer trauma-sensitive yoga classes that teach vital self-regulation skills and personal agency. The yoga program aims to release students from the cycles of recidivism and encourages them to respond in healthier ways to situations that can put them at risk.

Both in person and in virtual classes, teachers employ valuable cueing, breathwork and mindfulness techniques. They also collaborate with mental health teams at facilities and the State to assess the efficacy of their yoga interventions. They have published a pilot study of the efficacy of their work through the National Institutes of Health.

Adequate training and experience are vital to volunteering with at-risk youth, notes Lewinger. CY instructors are deeply committed to equity and kindness and to the validity of yoga as a healing modality. They are also deeply engaged in self-reflection and commit to a collaborative experience of yoga rather than a top-down model of teaching. While it is a privilege to do this work, says Lewinger, it is also a significant responsibility to be adequately prepared. Their two-day teacher training begins April 16, 2026. Inquire at centeringyouth@gmail.com.



Yoga at Be Tru Studios

Photo: Greg Kennard

Be Tru Studios and Nspire Outreach in Lawrenceville and Greater Atlanta

In Lawrenceville, Be Tru Studios provides volunteer-led yoga classes for the non-profit programs offered by Nspire Outreach. Nspire service participants usually move as a cohort through the yoga program for a number of months, receiving support for domestic violence survivorship and addiction recovery. The yoga classes are beginner-friendly and trauma-informed and include short breathwork and meditation practices. Be Tru's owner, Victoria Ladd, directs the program and believes it is a grounding lifeline for members as they address their need for housing, employment, education, counseling, domestic violence safety, clothing and more.

Nspire Outreach is focused on restoring dignity, resilience and human connection and is rooted in the belief that healing is possible for everyone and that service and self-care belong to everyone as well.



Jillian Dillard

Be Tru Studios is actively seeking volunteer yoga teachers. For more information, visit bit.ly/nspire-signup.

FreedOM Youth Yoga in Metro Atlanta

FreedOM Youth Yoga (FYY) serves underprivileged children, ages 2 through 18, throughout the metro Atlanta area. Its central mission is to provide equitable access to the valuable tools that yoga provides for lifelong, community-wide mental, physical and behavioral wellness.

With core values of equity, community and authenticity, FYY is motivated by the belief that every single child, regardless of zip code, deserves to understand and practice tools for resilience, healing and personal freedom. The goal is that the effects of their work will ripple out into families, schools and the wider communities.

In partnership with other non-profit organizations and schools, a dedicated team of contracted FYY teachers provides developmentally-appropriate yoga-based curricula in after-school programs, summer camps, hospitals and more. Since its inception in 2018, FYY has offered "noisy, bouncy, music-filled, laughter-inducing yoga classes," says founder Jillian Dillard, where students learn how to breathe intentionally, focus better and make active choices in alignment with their goals and dreams. In short, she says, they learn to self-regulate when big emotions start to overwhelm them.

FYY recently embarked upon a new partnership with the Children's Hospital of Atlanta and will hold its annual fundraiser in March. To get involved as a donor or a volunteer, visit FreedomYouthYoga.org/support-us.



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.

CALENDAR

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10

Hatha Yoga with Tamila - 9:45-10:45am. A traditional Hatha practice emphasizing breath, alignment, and mindful movement. Ideal for all levels. \$25 for a single class or \$59 for a 3-week unlimited intro offer. Location: Many Paths Wellness Studio, 27 Oak St, Roswell, GA. bit.ly/Hatha-Yoga-With-Tamila-011026

Feed Your Peace - 2-4:30pm. Join Chef Naina Bhedwar for a mindful culinary journey exploring spices, presence, and peace. Includes cooking Persian lentil stew and rosewater custard. \$75. Location: Vista Yoga, Atlanta. bit.ly/Vista-Yoga

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

Rolling With The Homies - 7-8:30pm. Learn to roll like a pro in this fun, laid-back session with wraps, tips, and practice herbs included. Ages 21+. \$17.85. Location: Twisted Dips, 1299 Glenwood Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Rolling-With-The-Homies-011426

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18

Sound Bath & Restorative Yoga - 1-3pm. Deep relaxation with restorative yoga, Reiki, and chakra-balancing sound bath. Hosted by Healing Hands Reiki, Atlanta.

\$28.45. bit.ly/Sound-Bath-Restorative-Yoga-011826

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

Universal Yoga® Teacher Training - Level 2 with Andrey Lappa - 8am-6:30pm. Intensive 100-hour advanced yoga training covering vinyasa, pranayama, chakras, and more. \$2800. Aum Studio for Wellness, Atlanta. bit.ly/Aum-Studio

THURSDAYS, JAN 15 - FEB 5

Now Begins the Yoga: A Beginner's Series - 6:30-8pm. 4-week intro to yoga with Tracy James, ideal for true beginners. Focus on postures, breath, and the beginner's mindset. \$140 (10% off for returning students). Vista Yoga, Decatur. bit.ly/Vista-Yoga

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18

Hops & Flow Beer Yoga at Fire Maker Brewing - 11-12pm. All-levels indoor yoga session with a beer or seltzer. \$22.92. bit.ly/Hops-Flow-Beer-Yoga-Fire-Maker-011826

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

Yoga Class at Ponce Library - 10:30-11:30am. All-level yoga session led by Manju K. of Seven Hills Yoga Studio. Bring

your own mat. Open to adults and teens. Free. Location: Joan P. Garner Library at Ponce De Leon, Atlanta, GA. bit.ly/Yoga-at-Ponce-Library-012626

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1

Hops & Flow Beer Yoga - 10-11am. All-levels yoga + a beer or coffee at Monday Night Brewing's The Grove. Held on the mezzanine. \$25.24. Location: 670 Trabert Ave NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Hops-Flow-Beer-Yoga-020126

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

Belly Yoga & Sacred Goddess Workshop - 11am. Start of 8-week journey blending belly dance, fan choreography, and feminine empowerment with Aynil, Antonina & Natalia. Packages from \$188. Aum Studio for Wellness, Atlanta. bit.ly/Aum-Studio

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5

Hot Yoga: RnB Edition - 10-11am. Flow and stretch in a heated room to smooth RnB beats with instructor Tijuana. All levels welcome. \$16.34. Location: Double Dutch Fitness, 2030 Bolton Rd NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Hot-Yoga-RnB-Edition-020526

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.

Saturday, January 3

Transmission Meditation – 7:30pm. Join this online meditation session sponsored by Share International USA. A service activity for the world and a way to build spiritual awareness. Free. Info: 770-302-2208 or info-se@Share-International.us. bit.ly/Transmission-Meditation-010326

Wednesday, January 7

Walk It Out Wednesdays w/ Ranger Dofice – 4-6pm. Join a brisk, guided hike through Arabia Mountain to refresh your mind and body. Free. Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Center, Stonecrest. bit.ly/Walk-It-Out-Wednesday-010726

Thursday, January 8

Sunday Stroll Coat Drive – 11am-1pm. Join a walk on the Atlanta Beltline and donate coats, socks, or blankets to support Bridge of Light ATL. Free. Iululemon, 675 Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Ste C187, Atlanta. bit.ly/Sunday-Stroll-Coat-Drive-010826

Friday, January 9

Live Life Pain-Free: Medical & Sports Massage for Every Body – 9:30am. Experience targeted relief through clinical massage including lymphatic drainage, deep tissue, and cupping. Not free. Medical & Sports Massage, Sandy Springs. 404-295-7040. bit.ly/Live-Life-Pain-Free-010926

Sunday, January 11

Sunday Wisdom Talks – 12:30-1:30pm. Engage in small group reflections to inspire goodness in thought, speech, and action. Free. Georgia Meditation Center, 4522 Tilly Mill Rd, Atlanta. bit.ly/Sunday-Wisdom-Talks-011126

Wednesday, January 14

Beginner's Zen Meditation Class at Dharma Jewel Monastery Atlanta – 7-9pm. Explore Zen meditation and Buddhist philosophy in this 20-week course led by ordained monastics. Free. Dharma Jewel Monastery, 2550 Henderson Mill Rd NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Zen-Meditation-Dharma-Jewel-Monastery-011426

Thursday, January 15

Healing Sound Bath with Raye Andrews - 7-8 pm. Join Certified Vibrational Sound Therapist, Raye Andrews, for a beautiful symphony of sound. This immersive, full-body listening experience can bring relaxation to your mind, body and spirit. Suggested love offering \$20-\$40. Held in the Chapel. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Friday, January 16

Fitness on the Field '26 – 6-8pm. Sweat, dance, and move during two fitness classes inside Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Free admission and parking. Ages 16+. Mercedes-Benz Stadium, 1 AMB Dr NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Fitness-On-The-Field-011626

Saturday, January 17

Red Light Running Society: Run or Walk (and more!) Every SATURDAY – 10am-1pm. Walk, jog, or run with all fitness levels, followed by cooldown and strength training. Free. Red Light Cafe, 553 Amsterdam Ave NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Run-or-Walk-011726

Sunday, January 18

Healing Psychic Fair – 10am. Experience spirit-to-spirit connection with psychics, astrologers, healers, and more. \$20/adults, \$10/seniors, \$5/kids. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St NE, Ste A, Atlanta. bit.ly/Healing-Psychic-Fair-011826

Ruth Heart Route – 3.8 Miles of Strength – 10am-12pm. Timed walk/run honoring heart health warriors. All ages welcome. From \$28.52. The Meadow at Piedmont Park, Atlanta. bit.ly/Ruth-Heart-Route-011826

Monday, January 19

Medicare 101: Come Learn With Us – 10am-12pm. Learn the basics of Medicare, including Parts A-D, costs, plan types, and avoiding penalties. Free. Elizabeth L Thompson Agency, 510 Plaza Dr, Ste 1210, Atlanta. bit.ly/Medicare-Education-011926

Tuesday, January 20

Breathe by Shanice at Hyatt Centric Midtown Atlanta – 6:30-7:30pm. Enjoy a free, inclusive Vinyasa yoga class led by Shanice Richards. All levels welcome. Hyatt Centric Midtown, 125 10th St NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Breathe-by-Shanice-012026

Wednesday, January 21

HPC x Condesa Coffee: Faith & Wellness Co-Working Morning – 10am-1:30pm. Join faith-driven, wellness-focused professionals for connection, collaboration, and co-working. Free. Condesa Coffee, Atlanta. Hosted by Her Promise Circle. bit.ly/Faith-and-Wellness-CoWorking-012126

Thursday, January 22

Martial Arts Introductory Class | Practical Self-Defense – 7-8pm. Try an intro session in traditional Ninjutsu with Atlanta Bujinkan. Ages 16+. \$13.48. Sandy Springs (address upon registration). bit.ly/Martial-Arts-Introductory-012226

Wisdom and Healing Through Shamanic Journeys – 7-8:30pm. Experience guided

shamanic drumming journeys to connect with spirit guides for insight and healing. \$28.16. Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore Annex, 5505 Roswell Rd NE, Rm 215, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Wisdom-and-Healing-Through-Shamanic-Journeys-012226

Free Salsa Dance Lessons – Dance, Wine, Dine & Unwind – 8:30-10:00pm. Free salsa class with live band (Willie Ziavino & C.O.T. Band). Tapas, cocktails, and great vibes at Eclipse di Luna, Buckhead. Free. bit.ly/Salsa-Wine-Dine-012226

Friday, January 23

Rest and Reset: Yoga Networking for Mental Health Professionals – 9:30-11:30am. Gentle yoga, sound bath, and networking to recharge and connect. Free. Lift Yoga Alpharetta, 501 S Main St, Ste 101, Alpharetta. bit.ly/Rest-and-Reset-Yoga-012326

Workout Training Every Friday 7pm @ theatlwarriors – 7:30-8:30pm. Train for obstacle races with full-body workouts designed for all fitness levels. Free. Peachtree Corners Path to Fitness, 5140 Town Center Blvd, Peachtree Corners. bit.ly/Workout-Training-012326

Saturday, January 24

Free Saturday HIIT Workout Class – 10-11am. Burn calories and boost fitness with a high-energy HIIT session for all levels. Free. Jamie The Motivator, 3365 West Hospital Ave, Ste G, Chamblee. bit.ly/Saturday-HIIT-Workout-012426

Tai Chi – Easy Flow with Mindful Movement – 2pm. Enjoy gentle, mindful Tai Chi guided by certified instructor Michele Wynn. All levels welcome. \$10. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St NE, Ste A, Atlanta. bit.ly/Tai-Chi-Easy-Flow-012426

Rooted in Wellness Wednesday – 12:30-2pm. A cycle-breaking workshop for conscious parents with journaling, self-care, and family-building tools. \$17.85 with meal. Private location, Gresham Park, Decatur. bit.ly/Rooted-in-Wellness-Wednesday-012426

Sunday, January 25

Worship and Workout Bootcamp – 8:30am. A dynamic blend of fitness and faith featuring full-body workouts, prayer, and worship music. All levels welcome. Free. Location: JTM Fitness Gym, 3365 West Hospital Avenue, Suite G, Chamblee, GA. bit.ly/Worship-Workout-012526

Sound Bath & Restorative Yoga – 1-3pm. Deeply relaxing yoga session infused with Reiki, sound healing, and chakra balancing. \$28.45. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St NE, Ste A, Atlanta. bit.ly/Sound-Bath-Restorative-Yoga-012526

Monday, January 26

“Almost Free” Yoga & Run Club in Sandy Springs – 6:30-7:30pm. Join a \$10 yoga class focused on stretch and recovery. All levels welcome. Medical & Sports Massage, 6000 Lake Forrest Dr NW, Ste 375, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Yoga-and-Run-Club-012626

Wednesday, January 28

Weekly Wed Meditation Class – 7-8:30pm. Enjoy guided meditation, stretching, and a wisdom talk led by certified coaches and monks. Free; donation optional. Georgia Meditation Center, 4522 Tilly Mill Rd, Atlanta. bit.ly/Weekly-Wednesday-Meditation-Class-012826

Thursday, January 29

Overmedicated: A Tough Pill To Swallow – 11:30am-1:30pm. Industry experts discuss medication overuse among seniors and safer healthcare choices. Free. Somerby Sandy Springs, 25 Glenlake Pkwy NE, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Overmedicated-A-Tough-Pill-To-Swallow-012926

Saturday, January 31

Healthy, Wealthy, and Whole: Starting the Year Strong – 11am-2:30pm. Free in-person event with line dancing, light bites, giveaways, and financial tips for a healthier, wealthier 2026. Free. Greater Atlanta NCNW. bit.ly/Healthy-Wealthy-Whole-013126

A Better U: Learn to Treat Your Metabolic Illnesses at the Root Cause – 11am. Discover how to reverse diabetes, reduce blood pressure, and overcome overeating through time-based eating and natural products. Free. 395 Mount Vernon Hwy, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Learn-To-Your-Metabolic-Illnesses-013126

Reiki Share – 3:30-5:30pm. Connect with fellow Reiki practitioners for group healing sessions and energy work. \$23.91. Healing Hands Reiki, 27 Waddell St, Ste A, Atlanta. bit.ly/Reiki-Share-013126

Sunday, February 1

Children and Family Meditation Class at Atlanta Zen Buddhist Temple – 10-11:30am. Includes storytelling, crafts, games, and mindfulness for ages 5-13. Free. Dharma Jewel Monastery, 2550 Henderson Mill Rd, Atlanta. bit.ly/Children-and-Family-Meditation-Class-020126

Monday, February 2

MOMmoves: The Mental Wellness Edition – 7-9pm. Single moms gather for real talk on mental health, self-care, and accessing affordable support. Free. 6328 Mableton Pkwy, Mableton. bit.ly/Mom-Mental-Wellness-020226

ONGOING

Sundays

Practicing the Presence - A Course in Miracles – 8:45-10:30am. 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, Closes 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 Healing & Wellness Course – 10:30am-12:30pm. Six-week course meets once weekly, Sundays or Wednesdays. Deepen your meditation or explore healing paths. Transform your life and connect spiritually. Andrea, 404-557-4306. Norcross.

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. The uplifting Sunday services include prayer, message, and guided meditation. Special music is provided by Unity Atlanta Church's Soulful Harmonics Band and Celebration Choir. 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. Unity Atlanta Church, 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 Pranik Healing Center via Zoom. To watch: AtlPranicHealing.com.

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

Tuesdays

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 – 7-8:30pm. 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. MeditationInGeorgia.org.

Weekly Wednesday Meditation Class – 7-8:30pm. Open to all levels. Experience true inner peace. With the Venerable Nicholas Thannissaro of the Georgia Meditation Center via Zoom. To register: [Meditation Circle.org](https://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. ForeverAndA-Day.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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Five Little Words

by Amy Anderson



Karola C/Pexels.com

Last year, I received the news that I needed a diagnostic mammogram because something needed a closer look. I am a worrier by nature, and I felt a jolt of panic, my breath tightened and a blanket of fear covered me. And familiar catastrophic thinking patterns that I'd spent years working to control kicked into high gear.

In the days ahead, when I felt waves of anxiety, I turned to a variety of tried and trusted tools. I prayed. I visualized the outcome I hoped for. I repeated mantras. I used yoga to drop into the wisdom of my body. I used breathwork and meditation to separate my "self" from my thoughts. I journaled. I had the realization that catastrophic thinking was simply one part of my mind attempting to prepare me for the worst outcome by planning for it. None of it was based on logical reasoning.

Driving to my appointment, I was still worried but not as much as before. My prayer was that I would feel God's presence and maintain a sense of peace regardless of the outcome. I created a pretty simple mantra that I repeated to myself: "It's going to be okay." After I arrived, a nurse called my name and introduced herself as Lynn. There was a quality about her energy that immediately put me at ease. She led me to

a smaller waiting room with lockers and handed me a gown. I followed her brief instructions, changed behind a curtain and found a seat.

I noticed two other women who were looking down at their phones. I checked my texts. I scrolled through Instagram to peruse some funny reels. My thumb repeatedly moved up and down the screen, scrolling from one hilarious reel to the next. "Humor is such a great distraction in a time like this," I thought. But after a short time, I lost interest in my phone. My mind went back to that word. "Distraction."

Is distraction what is needed right now? These tests are trying, but there are also lessons to be gleaned. I've had to learn this on more than a few occasions! Do I need distraction, or do I need to be present in this space? I knew the answer, but wasn't sure I liked it. Undeniably, something was calling me to be present, so I figured I should listen.

I wondered about the other women sitting there with me; what we have in common and how different we might be. We were a sisterhood of strangers facing uncertainty, worried about our health, our families, our jobs, our futures, yet trying to stay grounded as we waited together.

I wondered how the energy in the room would shift if we were engaging with each other, rather than remaining in the silos of smartphones. Something urged me to connect with these women.

I'm a social person, a talker, but striking up conversations with strangers in uncomfortable places is most definitely not in my wheelhouse. I auditioned opening lines in my head, but everything felt wrong and awkward. I decided to silently pray for each of them. I repeated my mantra for all of us. "It's going to be okay."

Lynn appeared, and I followed her down the hallway to an office to fill out some forms. She patiently watched the computer slowly come to life. I closed my eyes and silently repeated my mantra over and over. "It's going to be okay." Then, Lynn's soft hand touched my arm, "Mrs. Anderson," she said, "it's going to be okay."

I felt that little thrill of exhilaration when you realize the universe is alive and well and at work all around you. "I was just saying those very words in my mind over and over just now. And you just spoke them to me!" I told her.

"Really? How about that?" she replied, without a hint of surprise.

As we sat and talked, I took comfort in the light that came through in her calming and reassuring energy.

My prayer that morning was, "God help me to feel your presence and have peace no matter what the outcome." I just didn't expect the answer to come in the form of a nurse saying five little words to me at the exact right moment. 🙏



Amy W. Anderson is a writer and yoga teacher navigating the "beautiful chaos of family life"—guiding others to connect more deeply while learning to do the same herself. Follow her work on Substack: Amy-Wanders-On.

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