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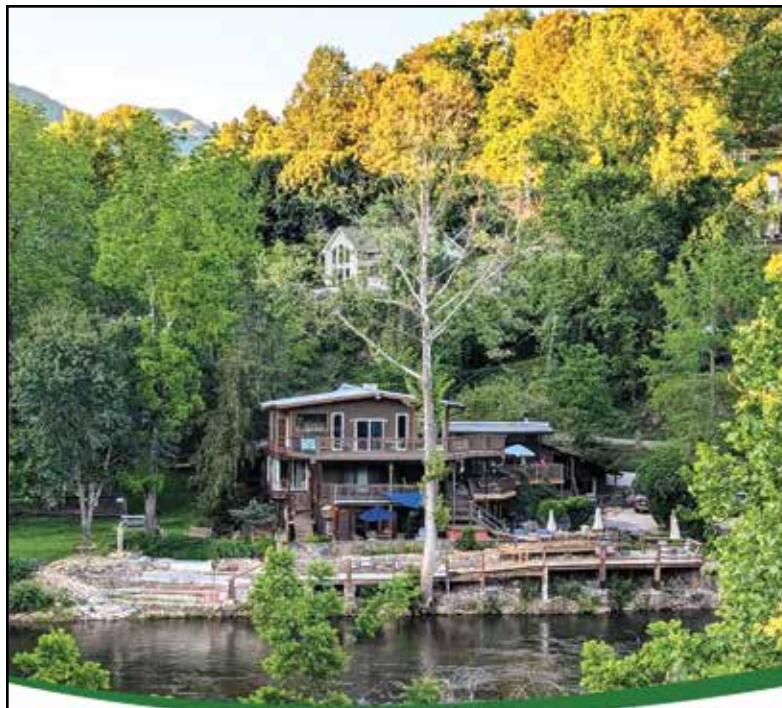
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May it be that you can withstand this change and accept My Light.

Many times before have I told you that My Appearance is nigh.

Look then carefully, My friends, and miss Me not.

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GESHE LOBSANG TENZIN NEGI
on Cultivating Compassion and Connection

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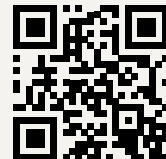
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Correction: In our May news brief about Sunshine and Good Vibes' program, the office address was incorrect. The correct address is: 2255 Cumberland Pkwy, Suite #100 in Smyrna.

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Compassion as Enlightened Self-Interest



Photo: Tenzin Choejor (Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama)

book demonstrates, one can train in compassion to increase one's capacity for and use of it.

That said, there are still the barriers of attachment and hatred; that is, most of us are inclined to extend compassion only to those we know and love. Of that practice, Jesus asks, "So what?"

In Matthew 5:43–47, he says, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

Here, a deeper understanding of reality would help prompt one to develop more compassion. The Buddhist teacher Kadam Morten Clausen, who recently taught in Atlanta, says: "If you think of Geshe-le's [Geshe Kelsang Gyatso is the founder of the New Kadampa Tradition] analogy where he says that we are like one cell in the body of all living beings, if you understood 'I'm one cell... interconnected with all these other cells,' and that the welfare of this one cell very much depends on what all the other cells are up to, you would look after the other cells." Or, as Negi writes, "compassion arises from a deep, bodily understanding that we are intrinsically connected."

Until one has a direct experience of the interconnectedness of all things, however, we need to have faith in the words of spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Gyatso. "All the happiness there is in the world

I'm not the only one who feels that our collective impulse toward compassion could be at an all-time low. The Muhammad Ali Center Compassion Report of 2025 found that 61% of Americans believed compassion has declined, and only one-third said they felt compassion for everyone.

But here's the thing: Compassion is good for our health, physically and emotionally. Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, the founder and spiritual director of Drepung Loseling and co-founder and executive director of the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics at Emory, has just published *Engaged Compassion*, a secular, seven-step training in developing compassion. [See our interview with him on page 31.] In it, he cites many benefits to practicing compassion meditation, saying, among other things, it "reduces the stress hormone

cortisol, lowers inflammation markers... strengthens the immune response." Also, research participants experienced "higher levels of emotional well-being, less depression and anxiety and a greater sense of purpose and social connection."

For the spiritually inclined, Mahayana Buddhists see compassion as the path to enlightenment. In the opening verses to Chandrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way*, he says: "Compassion alone is accepted as the seed of the perfect harvest of Buddhahood, as water for its growth and as the ripened fruit that is a long source of enjoyment. Therefore, at the beginning, I praise compassion."

So, while we may be experiencing a dearth of compassion in our culture, we have all the reasons we need to develop it. Call it enlightened self-interest. And as Negi's

Continued on page 16

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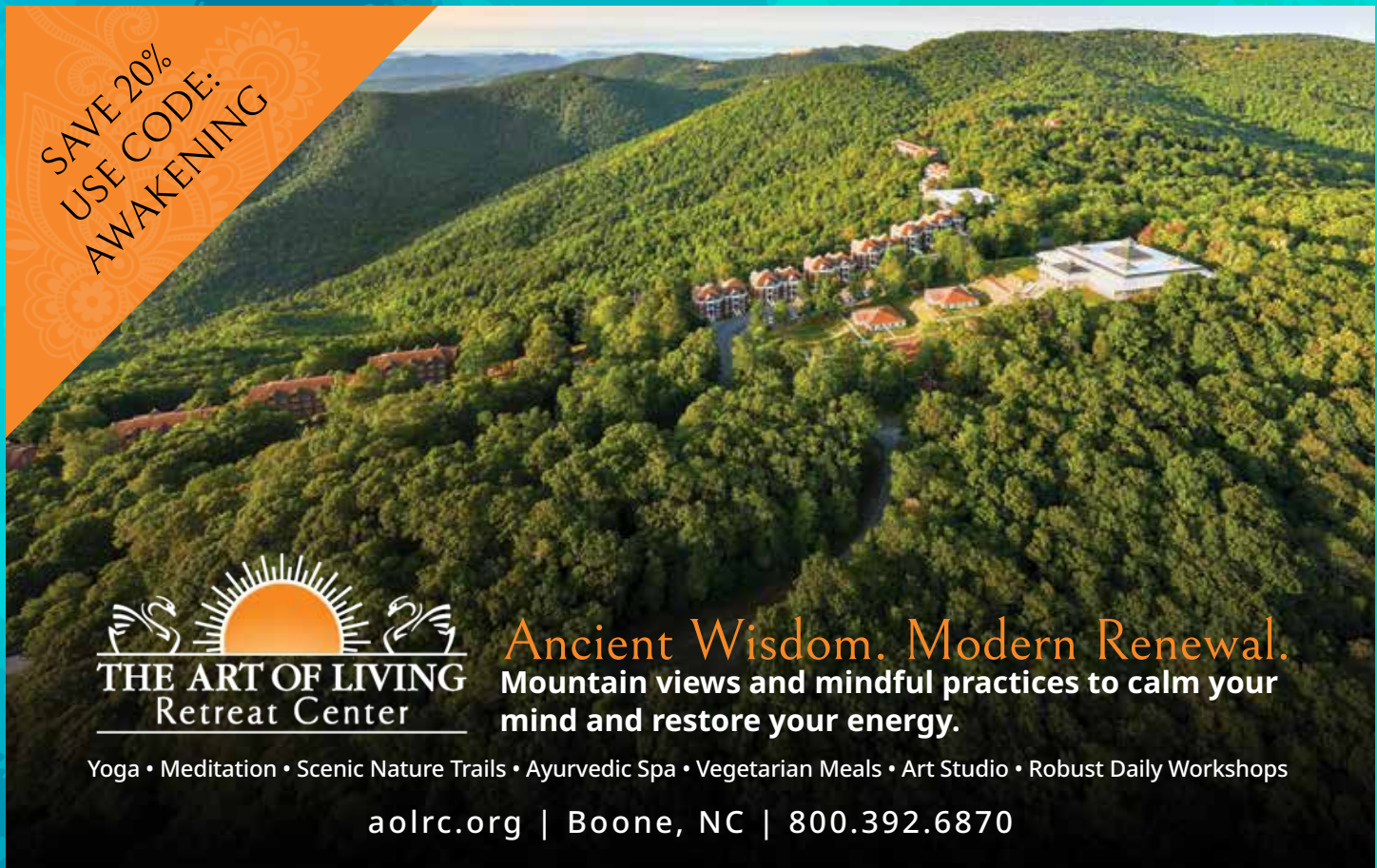
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Cereset on Ponce Introduces NetworkFlow

Cereset on Ponce introduces Cereset's BrainEcho NetworkFlow, a 2026 evolution of the company's patented non-invasive brain-mirroring technology, designed to better support the brain's natural communication pathways and overall regulation. The center is hosting an open house from 2 to 4 p.m. on June 14 at 931 Ponce de Leon Ave, Suite 205, to introduce NetworkFlow to the Atlanta community.

NetworkFlow is built from ongoing research, data analysis and thousands of client sessions. It focuses on how different regions of the brain work together as a coordinated network. The approach is intended to help the brain reset, regulate and restore itself more effectively. The updated version is designed to help the brain release stress more efficiently, improve sleep, mood and mental clarity and create more stable, lasting patterns of balance.

Ruthie Emrick, owner and tech coach, says the new enhancements are part of the center's continuing work with clients seeking support for stress, sleep, mood, mental clarity and self-regulation. "Cereset's BrainEcho NetworkFlow is the next step in brain support—built from thousands of sessions and research," says Emrick. "It helps the brain thrive, giving clients better sleep, sharper focus and more energy—all with less intervention."

Cereset on Ponce is located at 931 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Suite 205, in Atlanta. For more information, call 678-487-7714 or visit Cereset.com/Centers/Cereset-On-Ponce.



Raw Food Festival Promotes Integrative Healing

Tassili's Raw Reality Café presents the 16th Annual Wonderful Wizards of Raw Food Extravaganza June 5 through 7, in the historic West End community in Atlanta. The three-day event features keynote speaker Tassili Ma'at, founder and CEO of Tassili's Raw Reality Café, who shares her personal healing journey after a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer in 2021.

Ma'at, a culinary alchemist, spiritual counselor and community activist, plans to discuss the integrative healing modalities she continues to use in her recovery. Attendees also have the opportunity to meet healers, doctors, scientists, holistic practitioners, herbalists, counselors and members of Ma'at's support team who have contributed to her wellness journey over the past six years.



"This immersive experience in healing empowers people to take their health into their own hands," says Ma'at. "I encourage people to listen to their bodies' wisdom and align themselves with truth, justice, order, balance, harmony, reciprocity and propriety for long life, prosperity and well-being."

The event also includes speakers, vendors, entertainment, interactive audience discussions and two donation-based herb walks at Cascade Nature Preserve and in the West End community. Two indigenous sweat lodge ceremonies with limited ticket availability are also offered. The event takes place

June 5 from 4 to 8 p.m. and from 2 to 11 p.m. on June 6 and 7.

For more information, call 678-886-5929 or visit TassilisRaw.com/Wonderful-Wizards-Of-Raw. Tassili's Raw Reality Café is located at 1059 Ralph David Abernathy Blvd. in Atlanta.



Smarter Summer Grilling

Making Barbecue More Flavorful and Healthy

by Maya Whitman



Max kegfire/Shutterstock

One of her favorite things to do is to serve proteins on ample salads, such as her Summer Grilled Corn and Peach Salad With Chicken on a bed of spring mix lettuce. The corn, peaches and chicken are all grilled, and the lightly sweet dressing (and marinade) is made with honey, lime and fresh cilantro.

For traditionalists that love grilled burgers, Mauney suggests adding chopped red bell peppers or shallots to healthier, leaner meats like grass-fed ground beef, turkey or chicken. She also likes introducing finely diced mushrooms into a beef burger patty to increase nutrient density (fiber plus vitamins) while making it more tender and juicy.

Meatless Options

Plant-based chef Julia Dunaway, in Azle, Texas, is influenced by her mother's Japanese heritage and cooking style, which included grilled ingredients and an unforgettable homemade teriyaki sauce. Dunaway's black bean burger cooked on the grill, griddle or grill pan, is topped with cashew cheese sauce and the usual burger toppings on a whole-grain bun. "This burger, served with grilled vegetables and even grilled potato slices, is better than any meat-heavy cookout," she asserts.

Other grilled favorites include Tex-Mex vegetable fajitas, large marinated mushrooms, zucchini and corn on the cob. Grilling eggplant sprinkled with cumin, asparagus with fresh garlic and stone fruits like peaches, plums and nectarines with cinnamon or ground cloves are delicious ways to pile anti-inflammatory goodness onto summer plates.

Summer would not be the same without dinner on the grill. For many Americans, backyard barbecuing is revered as an art form. In recent years, the classic menu of sizzling meats and charred corn on the cob has expanded to include healthier options such as plant-forward burgers, gut-friendly marinades and anti-inflammatory approaches that lower smoke points and use antioxidant-rich herbs and spices to reduce the formation of cancer-causing compounds.

Despite some evidence of an increased risk for colorectal, prostate and pancreatic cancer from high consumption of barbecued, well-done and fried foods, research published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry* in 2018 highlights an increase of good gut bacteria from grilling (and roasting) compared to less

heat-intense forms of cooking. Swapping out bottled sauces with questionable ingredients for healthy homemade marinades, avoiding blackened meats and embracing a broader food spectrum will lower health risks while satisfying every palate.

Mouthwatering Enhancements

"Rather than only sticking with the typical hot dogs or burgers at your next barbecue, try introducing some creativity into the mix," recommends Anne Mauney, a registered dietitian in Washington, D.C., and founder of the *FannetasticFood.com* recipe blog. "One of my favorite grilled meals is shrimp skewers with chimichurri [made with finely chopped parsley, minced garlic, oregano, olive oil, red wine vinegar and a sprinkle of red pepper flakes]. The chimichurri does double duty as a marinade and sauce, and it's incredibly fresh and delicious."

Healthy, Flavor-Boosting Hacks

According to *Oncology Nursing News*, grilling meat at high temperatures or over an open flame can produce cancer-causing substances called heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). To reduce the risk of carcinogen formation, cooking over indirect heat is recommended. Eating charred meat should be avoided. Marinating meat for 20 to 30 minutes before cooking can also keep the surface of the meat from getting too hot. Adding antioxidant- and polyphenol-rich herbs like basil, rosemary and mint along with citrus juices or vinegar will provide great flavor, as well as disease-fighting nutrients.

When brushing ingredients with oil, avocado oil is recommended for its health benefits and high smoke point. Olive oil is also nutrient-dense, flavorful and anti-inflammatory. Dunaway's favorite marinade replaces oil with tahini, a sesame-seed paste, and incorporates plenty of herbs and spices with vegetable broth to keep vegetables moist throughout grilling.

"I use a gas grill with a large grilling surface, making sure it is very clean. Heating the grill on high for several minutes and cleaning the grates is essential. The marinated vegetables and tofu won't stick on a clean grill," Dunaway explains. "Once clean, reduce the heat to medium to avoid charring, while still getting a light grill mark. Just plan to cook the vegetables on a lower heat for a longer time so they are tender and cooked throughout."

Jazzing things up with probiotic-rich sides, including colorful slaws and fermented kimchi or kraut adds another healthy, tasty dimension. Swap everyday potatoes for sweet potatoes and drizzle with a tangerine vinaigrette for a different twist on potato salad or toss chickpeas with kalamata olives and feta. Creative pairings are the heart of a good grill, and the sky's the limit. 🌱

Maya Whitman is a frequent writer for Natural Awakenings.

GRILLED FAJITA VEGETABLES AND TOFU WITH MARINADE

YIELD: 2 TO 3 SERVINGS

MARINADE

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp Mexican oregano
- 1 tsp red chili powder
- 1 Tbsp tahini
- 2 Tbsp lime juice
- 1 Tbsp low sodium soy sauce
- 1 cup low sodium vegetable broth

VEGETABLES

- 2 portobello mushrooms, stems removed, sliced into strips
- 1-2 bell peppers, sliced into large pieces
- 2 cups zucchini or summer squash, sliced
- 1 sweet onion, sliced
- 1 white or sweet potato, baked or steamed ahead and cooled, sliced
- Jalapeño peppers to taste
- Other in-season vegetables, especially eggplant and okra
- 1 16-oz block of super-firm tofu

Mix the marinade ingredients and place in a large measuring cup.

Place the vegetables (except the baked potatoes) in a shallow baking dish or

gallon-sized plastic bag and add about half of the marinade. Allow the vegetables to marinate in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to 2 hours.

Cover the block of tofu with the remaining marinade, reserving a quarter cup to be used later. Place the marinating tofu in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes, then cut it into 8 slices.

Heat a gas or charcoal grill to medium heat (high heat will burn the vegetables). Grill the tofu 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Grill the vegetables on one side for 3 to 4 minutes or until grill marks appear, then turn them over and reduce the heat to low.

Brush the vegetables with the reserved marinade and close the grill or cover the vegetables with a dome lid or foil tent. Continue grilling the vegetables until they are tender but not burned, basting them a couple more times with the remaining marinade.

Serve the grilled tofu and vegetables on a large platter with flour tortillas, guacamole, salsa and beans on the side.

Recipe courtesy of Chef Julia Dunaway



Sashka B/Shutterstock



Julia Dunaway

THE BEST BLACK BEAN BURGERS

YIELD: 8 BURGERS

- 1 cup oats
- 1 cup walnut pieces
- 1 cup red onion, finely chopped
- 2/3 cup cremini mushrooms, chopped
- 1/2 cup red bell pepper, chopped
- 1/2 cup carrots, diced
- 2 Tbsp jalapeño peppers, chopped
- 3 cups home-cooked black beans (or 2 cans, rinsed and drained)
- 2 Tbsp ground flaxseeds
- 2 Tbsp nutritional yeast
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp paprika
- 2 tsp seasoning blend (such as Kirkland Signature No Salt Seasoning)
- 2 tsp low sodium soy sauce
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1 cup cooked brown rice

Pulse the oats and walnuts in a food processor until finely ground. Set aside.

In a large skillet, over medium-high heat, sauté the onion, mushrooms, bell peppers, carrots and jalapeño peppers until lightly browned. Add a little water. Cover and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the beans to the walnut and oat mixture in the food processor along with the ground flaxseeds, nutritional yeast, onion powder, garlic powder, paprika, seasoning blend, soy sauce and salt. Pulse a few times. Use a silicone spatula to distribute the ingredients and pulse again once or twice. Keep some of the beans chunky.

Remove the mixture from the food processor, add the cooked brown rice and mix well with the spatula. Divide into 8 patties using a 1/2 cup measuring cup. Place the patties on a cleaned grill, on indirect heat (medium), and cook for 10 minutes on each side.

Serve on whole-grain buns with any desired toppings such as lettuce, sliced tomatoes, pickles, onions, avocado and condiments like ketchup or mustard.

Recipe courtesy of Chef Julia Dunaway.

COLD SWEET POTATO SALAD WITH ARUGULA

YIELD: 4 TO 6 SERVINGS

- 5 medium-sized sweet potatoes
- 2 cups arugula, finely chopped
- 2 tangerines, peeled and segmented
- 1 tangerine for its juice
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 1 tsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 sprig of fresh mint, chopped
- 1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil



Rui Elena/Shutterstock

Peel and chop raw sweet potatoes into 1-inch pieces, then boil or steam until tender. Once cooked, drain and place them in a large bowl and refrigerate until cold.

Take chilled sweet potatoes out of the fridge and squeeze one tangerine over the pieces before adding vinegar, olive oil, sea salt, mint and the tangerine segments. Gently combine before folding in the arugula. Serve cold.

Recipe courtesy of Marlaina Donato.

ALL-PURPOSE FRESH GINGER, CILANTRO AND CHILE PEPPER MARINADE

This marinade is ideal for use with vegetables and meats either on the grill or in the oven.

YIELD: 1/3 TO 1/2 CUP

- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 limes, juiced
- 2 Tbsp liquid aminos or tamari
- 2 Tbsp maple syrup
- 1/4 tsp smoked salt
- 1 dried whole chili pepper, halved
- 1 large raw garlic clove, crushed
- 2 raw shallots, quartered or chopped
- 1 Tbsp fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil



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Combine all ingredients in a glass measuring cup or small bowl and stir well. Marinate meats for up to 24 hours or vegetables for half an hour. Grill as usual.

Recipe courtesy of Marlaina Donato.

arises from wishing others to be happy,” says Gyatso. “The path to enlightenment is really very simple — all we need to do is stop cherishing ourselves and learn to cherish others.”



I am pleased to announce that Progressive Medical Center, a longstanding leader in Atlanta’s functional/integrative medicine scene, established in 1998, will underwrite the Healing Ways department.

Progressive Medical Center helps patients achieve optimal health and wellness by targeting the root causes of their problems, not just their symptoms. The team follows a patient-focused approach that identifies and treats all aspects of patients’ physical, mental and emotional health. It creates customized treatments that draw from many medical specialties and heal the whole person with natural therapies.

Holistic healing, of course, is the core of our identity; we publish more articles in Healing Ways than in any other department. We averaged just under two Healing Ways articles per month in 2025.

Progressive Medical Center is one of Atlanta’s largest functional/integrative medicine practices with 19 practitioners, including naturopaths, chiropractors, a pediatrician, a dietician and a health coach. In addition, it runs Progressive Nutracare, a vitamins and supplements store right next door.

Please join me in welcoming Progressive Medical Center as a presenting partner for this magazine’s primary content, articles on holistic healing. 🌿



Publisher, Natural Awakenings Atlanta. Paul’s professional background includes strategic planning, marketing management and qualitative research. His spiritual orientation is nondual, drawing from Buddhism, yoga and Advaita Vedanta.

Nature’s Aromatic Wisdom

by Roz Zollinger



Soltzia/DepositPhotos.com

Before essential oils were ever placed into amber or blue bottles, they lived as wildflowers opening to the sun, roots deep within the earth. They lived among trees swaying with the wind, and herbs and flowers releasing fragrances after the warm summer rains. Aromatherapy begins in nature itself—in its ancient relationship between humans and the living earth. And essential oils are derived directly from nature’s healing intelligence.

Nature, the Nervous System and Aromatherapy

Modern life disconnects us from natural rhythms. Humanity around the world is feeling worried, stressed and overstimulated. In times when one is overwhelmed and concerned, essential oils can have the effect of calming the mind, the breath and the adrenal glands.

Diffusing and/or inhaling certain oils—such as ylang ylang, lavender, roman chamomile, frankincense and melissa—can be especially helpful at this time. There are also several rituals involving essential oils that can help lower stress levels, such as:

- Sit in morning sunlight with citrus oils
- Get an evening grounding foot massage with lavender, cedarwood and vetiver
- Walk in a forest and do deep aromatic breathing
- Create your own seasonal oil blends
- Garden with aromatic herbs
- Meditate in nature with frankincense

Aromatherapy and the Five Elements

Many healing traditions around the world draw on the five elements—earth, water,

fire, air and spirit/ether—as facilitators and guides for restoring balance, deepening self-awareness and supporting healing. Essential oils can help amplify a desired element to enhance the elements and their associated properties.

Earth. The earth element is grounding and provides stability and safety. It connects us to the power of the Divine, especially when one is feeling a sense of overwhelm and ungroundedness. Oils to enhance the earth element include vetiver, sandalwood, cedarwood and frankincense.

Water. The water element brings movement, emotion, cleansing and surrender, often in the form of emotional release and soothing. Oils to amplify the water element include jasmine, sandalwood, lavender and juniper.

Fire. The element of fire represents energy, transformation, passion and warmth. It is the heart at its best. Oils bringing fire help with circulation, vitality and motivation. They include ginger, black pepper, rose and rosemary.

Air. The air element resonates with breath, clarity and inspiration. They help to bring respiratory wellness and focus. Essential oils to enhance the properties of air include eucalyptus, peppermint, rosemary, ginger and clary sage.

Spirit/Ether. This element evokes stillness, connection and sacredness and the oils that carry this element help us connect with Spirit. They include rose, neroli, frankincense and myrrh.

Aromatherapy and the Seasons

Certain oils can be used to align with the energetic qualities associated with each of the four seasons.

In the spring, when renewal, cleansing and awakening are desired, one can use oils of geranium, lavender, lemon and grapefruit to bring freshness, detoxification and uplift.

In the summer season, oils of neroli, sweet

orange, rose and jasmine are often used to heighten one’s sense of expansion, joy and sunlight.

In the fall, when trees are losing their leaves, cedarwood, clove, orange and peppermint can be used to help one let go of what no longer serves them, ground and introspect.

In the winter, one can reach for frankincense, pine, myrrh, elemi or ginger to deepen rest, introspection and restoration. 🌿



A certified aromatherapist, reflexologist and energy healer, Roz Zollinger is the director and co-owner of Atlanta’s Heal Center and is recognized internationally

for her contributions in the fields of reflexology, aromatherapy and energy healing. She pioneered Aromatic Reflexology and developed the Zollinger BodySystems Method of Reflexology/Aromatherapy.

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The Facts About Low Testosterone

What Every Man Should Know

by Marlaina Donato



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Testosterone replacement therapy (TRT), available as injections, patches, gels, pills and implant pellets, was a global market worth nearly \$2 billion in 2022, and is projected to reach nearly \$3 billion by 2032, according to Allied Market Research. Yet TRT is often misused for symptoms like fatigue or for athletic enhancement, when it is actually meant to treat clinically diagnosed low testosterone.

While this pivotal sex hormone is responsible for male puberty, sperm production and healthy libido, it also acts as a critical metabolic regulator and driving force behind physical energy, healthy muscle mass, bone density, red blood cell production and mood regulation. When men experience a decline in performance—whether at work, in the gym or in the bedroom—it may be easy to assume that low testosterone levels are to blame, but the misuse

or overuse of TRT places users at risk for undesirable side effects.

According to the Mayo Clinic, the potential risks of TRT include: worsening sleep apnea; skin reactions, including acne; noncancerous growth of the prostate and growth of an existing prostate cancer; enlargement of the breasts; a reduction of sperm production; and overproduction of red blood cells, which could lead to a life-threatening pulmonary embolism. In addition, according to a 2018 study in the *World Journal of Men's Health*, TRT can cause infertility.

Reaching the Correct Diagnosis

The American Urological Association defines low testosterone as a total blood serum level below 300 nanograms per deciliter (ng/dL) on at least two separate early morning tests, accompanied by symptoms like low sex drive and performance, fatigue,

loss of muscle mass, increased body fat and depression.

“Many men are seeking TRT to treat nonspecific symptoms like general fatigue, weight gain or a slight dip in motivation—issues that are often the result of lifestyle factors, rather than low testosterone,” says Dr. Joel Fuhrman, president of the Nutritional Research Foundation and the author of several books, including *Eat for Life* and *Eat to Live Cookbook*. In light of the trend of TRT over-prescription and the considerable risks, Fuhrman stresses the importance of considering effective natural methods to restore hormonal balance.

Men can experience a decline in their testosterone levels for reasons beyond testosterone deficiency. “Thyroid problems, vitamin D deficiency, high prolactin [hormone], chronic stress, certain medications, opioids and antidepressants all suppress testosterone or mimic its symptoms. Run a full panel before assuming it’s your testosterone. You might be chasing the wrong problem,” advises Nelson Vergel, a hormone therapy researcher, men’s health educator and creator of *ExcelMale.com*, an online men’s health and TRT forum.

Vergel highlights the devastating effects of chronic unresolved stress, which “tells the brain to dial back testosterone production. It’s a survival mechanism; your body prioritizes threat-response over reproduction. It makes sense in the short term, but it’s devastating long-term.”

Raymond Wohl, the medical director of Chicago Male Clinic in Chicago, Illinois, says, “A decline in performance, libido or confidence is often an early warning sign of underlying issues such as elevated stress, reduced blood flow, hormonal imbalance or metabolic dysfunction.” Men are often surprised to discover that improvements in energy, sleep, weight management and mood frequently accompany enhanced sexual performance. Wohl emphasizes, “Sexual health is not separate—it’s a powerful indicator of total wellness. We recommend TRT only after a thorough

evaluation, including lab work, symptom analysis and lifestyle review.”

Functional medicine specialist and men’s health coach Dr. Andreas Boettcher, in Lakewood Ranch, Florida, also recommends a comprehensive approach. “You need to look at the full hormonal picture, including cortisol patterns across the day; levels of DHEA-sulfate, pregnenolone, estradiol and prolactin; thyroid function, including free T3 conversion; and insulin markers,” he explains, naming multiple hormones besides testosterone.

Addressing the gut-hormone axis—the network involving the gastrointestinal tract, gut microbiome and endocrine system—is also high on Boettcher’s radar. “Hormone metabolism, balance and excretion are deeply dependent on your gut,” he points out. “The gut microbiome influences the signaling of virtually every hormone in the body, but the gut-hormone axis is a two-way communication highway, and when it breaks down—through gut

permeability, dysbiosis [imbalance of gut flora] or chronic inflammation, hormone balance becomes nearly impossible to achieve, regardless of what else you do.”

Boettcher attests that approximately 80 percent of men receiving hormonal support no longer need TRT once the underlying factors are adequately addressed. Given the right environment, he explains, the endocrine system begins production at levels that restore vitality, energy, lean muscle mass and libido. During his mid-to-late 40s, Boettcher quadrupled his testosterone levels without resorting to TRT or shortcuts. Now approaching 60, he maintains a single-digit body fat percentage, which he attributes to consistent daily choices. He asserts that men are biologically designed to be lean, strong and metabolically healthy well into the latter half of life.

Testosterone Disruptors and Supporters

Vergel reports that a significant portion of his patients that were convinced they

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had low testosterone turned out to have undiagnosed sleep apnea. “Just one week of sleeping only five hours a night drops testosterone by 10 to 15 percent in otherwise healthy men,” he says. “That’s not trivial. Everything else you’re doing—diet, training or supplements—gets undermined if you’re chronically sleep-deprived. Fix the sleep, and testosterone often comes back on its own.”

Psychological factors should also be considered. “Men who have carried unaddressed trauma for years often look hormonally like someone 15 to 20 years older with lower testosterone, lower DHEA [a testosterone precursor], disrupted sleep and blunted growth hormone,” says Vergel. “No dose of TRT fully compensates for an unresolved psychological load. You have to work both sides.”

Boettcher emphasizes the role of alcohol as an underestimated and significant contributor to hormonal anomalies. “Even moderate, consistent alcohol consumption impairs liver function, and your liver is the primary site of estrogen clearance,” he explains. “Disrupt that clearance and estrogen accumulates, testosterone declines and the hormonal balance tips in exactly the wrong direction.”

Boettcher also highlights the potential damage caused by Ibuprofen, a common over-the-counter medication. Over time, chronic use can damage the gut lining, impair nutrient absorption and disrupt the raw materials the body needs to produce hormones.

Before making a lifelong commitment to hormone therapy, Fuhrman believes that most men can significantly improve their bioavailable testosterone levels by reducing body fat. “Adipose tissue contains high levels of the enzyme aromatase, which converts your existing testosterone into estrogen. Losing weight keeps your natural testosterone in circulation.”

He recommends resistance training, specifically compound movements such as squats, deadlifts, bench presses and curls to

trigger a metabolic and hormonal signaling environment. He also suggests a diet rich in green salads and vegetables, including broccoli, kale and arugula; polyphenol-rich foods such as beans to promote a healthy gut microbiome; and omega-3-rich nuts and seeds (walnuts, chia, flax and sesame seeds) to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and cognitive decline.

Vergel cautions against ultra-processed food and excessive sugar consumption, which contribute to abdominal fat accumulation. He emphasizes the importance of clean protein and healthy dietary fats. “Don’t fear fat,” he remarks. “Testosterone is synthesized from cholesterol, so olive oil, eggs, avocados and quality meat protein aren’t your enemies.”

Vitality at Any Age

Ultimately, feeling well enough to live life to the fullest is not exclusive to a fortunate few. Vergel asserts, “The men I’ve seen most vital in their 60s and 70s are the ones who didn’t accept decline as inevitable. They asked questions, found good doctors and stayed in the game.”

Wohl offers hope and inspiration, saying, “Aging is inevitable, but decline is not. Sexual health does not have an expiration date. With the right interventions, men can maintain, and often regain, high levels of vitality well into later decades. Our oldest patient is 84 and still thriving.” 🙌

Marlaina Donato is an author, painter and composer. Connect at WildflowersAndWoodsmoke.com.



Yoga



The Art of Letting Go

Yoga’s Role in Releasing Attachments

by Lana Kravtsova

This article was originally published in December 2023.

In our fast-paced modern society—burdened with technology, deadlines and unending to-do lists—ancient practices of mindfulness have reemerged as a refuge. However, as we strive for presence, we often find that our minds are entangled in various attachments—material, emotional or spiritual.

“Attachment” refers to the deep-seated habit of seeking happiness in transient things, leading to a cycle of craving and aversion. We become attached to people and places, titles and possessions. We also cling to our past traumas and experiences. Most importantly, we hold onto our identities and past versions of ourselves, even when we desperately want to grow and change. Transformation and growth become challenging when we carry so many attachments within our psyches.

As we navigate the waves of change that life offers, yoga serves as both an anchor and a sail, grounding us in awareness while propelling us toward growth. It gives us the mental clarity to recognize what must be let go and the emotional strength to actually do it.

Freeing One’s Higher Purpose

What if we could relinquish our attachments through a practice that has stood the test of time?

Yoga, a spiritual and physical discipline originating over 5,000 years ago, is designed for just that. While modern Western interpretations often focus on *asanas*, or physical postures, of yoga, in its entirety, yoga is a holistic lifestyle that teaches the art of letting go.

Lisa Harmon, a renowned yoga teacher and spiritual guide, explains, “Letting go allows us to live more fully, and for practitioners of yoga, this is the ultimate aim. Through yoga, we learn to recognize and release attachments that are inconsistent with our higher purpose.”

“It’s a profound experience—realizing that letting go is not a loss but a gain, a return to your authentic self,” shares Janet Matthews, a longtime yoga practitioner.



HayDmitry/DepositPhotos.com

When we let go of past versions of ourselves, we don’t lose our essence; we allow it to shine brighter. Yoga enables this shedding of old skins, inviting us to step into newer, fuller versions of ourselves.

“The only constant is change,” states Dr. Linda Green, a psychologist and yoga therapist. “Yoga helps us internalize this fundamental truth, making it easier to let go of outdated self-concepts.”

The Role of The Breath

The role of breathing in yoga is not just physiological; it serves as a vital link between the mind and body. Controlled breathing practices, or *pranayama*, help practitioners achieve mental clarity and emotional calm. A secondary analysis

of multiple studies in the *International Journal of Yoga Therapy* suggests that pranayama can significantly reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, aiding the process of letting go.

“As you deepen your breath, you deepen your awareness. Detaching from something requires first being fully aware of it,” says Harmon. Deepening your awareness is key to noticing and identifying emotions, thoughts and behaviors that don’t serve you anymore.

“Breathing is like a soft breeze that clears the fog,” says yoga instructor Sarah Evans. “With every conscious inhalation and exhalation, you’re not just enriching your body with oxygen; you’re also clarifying your sense of self.”

The Role of Asanas

Some yoga postures are specifically designed to target emotional blockages stored in the body, like the hips or heart area. These asanas can serve as catalysts for releasing past traumas and stress. For example, a deep hip opener, pigeon pose, is popular for eliciting emotional release.

“In my 20 years of practice, pigeon pose has always been the go-to asana for emotional healing,” says Evans. “People often hold back tears when they first experience the intensity of this pose.”

Child's pose is another profound asana for emotional release. By folding ourselves into a fetal position, we invoke the primal sense of safety and nurturing. This protective posture can unearth vulnerable emotions, offering an opportunity to confront and release them.

"Child's pose brings us back to a womb-like state of safety," explains Dr. Melanie Johnson, a psychologist and yoga therapist. "For those dealing with anxiety or past traumas, this pose can facilitate a gentle letting go."

Through these asanas, we are given a physical and psychological space to meet, acknowledge, and ultimately let go of our old identities.

The Role of Meditation

Through practices like mindfulness meditation, we become better at observing our thoughts and emotions without judgment. This increased self-awareness enables us to recognize aspects of ourselves that are transient, facilitating the process of letting go.

Meditation techniques that involve visualization or mantras can be potent tools for self-transformation. By focusing on an image or sound that resonates with the version of ourselves we aspire to be, we're more readily able to release past versions that hinder our growth.

"Mantra meditation is particularly powerful," notes Green. "Sound frequencies can alter brain waves, making it easier for us to access and reform deep-seated beliefs about ourselves."

The art of letting go, as offered by yoga, isn't merely an ancient teaching; it's a relevant, living practice inviting us to more fully embrace life in its most beautiful and most challenging moments. 🧘



Lana Kravtsova is a coach and a creator of personal development programs. Her exploration into conscious life change led her to discover yoga as a transformative tool.

She develops practices for conscious growth at Aum Center for Wellness in Alpharetta.



- A Focused Advertising Section -

CALENDAR

SATURDAY, JUNE 6

Yoga in The Park - Free Yoga at Grant Park – 10-11am. Weekly outdoor yoga series featuring gentle, all-levels flow led by rotating Atlanta yoga instructors. Registration required. Free. Grant Park greenspace near Sydney St SE and Cherokee Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-Grant-Park-060626.

Sip n Stretch Saturday Yoga! – 10am. Monthly yoga class featuring 60 minutes of guided movement followed by one complimentary beer or wine pour. Bring mat, towel, water bottle and blocks. From \$15.90. 1186 Canton St, Roswell. bit.ly/Sip-N-Stretch-Yoga-060626.

SUNDAY, JUNE 7

Reynoldstown Community Yoga + Farmer's Market – 10am. All-levels vinyasa flow featuring energizing movement, grounding stretches and community connection followed by Reynoldstown Farmer's Market. Donation-based; suggested \$10. Lang Carson Recreation Center, 100 Flat Shoals Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Reynoldstown-Yoga-Market-060726.

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

Candlelight Vinyasa & Yin Tuesdays – 6:30pm. Medium-paced candlelight vinyasa and yin class with empowering flow, centering yin and personalized instruction for all levels. From \$25.24. Neutral Moon Studio, 141 Mangum St SW, Ste 300, Atlanta. bit.ly/Candlelight-Vinyasa-Yin-060926.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

"ALMOST FREE" Yoga & Run Club in Sandy Springs! – 6:30pm. Community yoga and run/walk gathering featuring movement, stretching and connection for all fitness levels. Bring mat, towel and water. From \$0. 6000 Lake Forrest Dr NW, Ste 375, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Sandy-Springs-Yoga-Run-061026.

Themsdays: Queer Yoga in the Park – 6:30pm. Outdoor all-levels yoga class for queer folk and allies featuring intentional movement, community connection and affirming energy in Grant Park. Free. 740 Cherokee Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Queer-Yoga-Park-061026.

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

Yoga at the Darwin Hotel – 6:45pm. Free community yoga flow held Thursday evenings at the Darwin Hotel. All levels welcome; RSVP required as space is limited. Free. The Darwin Hotel, 585 Parkway Dr NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-Atlanta-Darwin-061126.

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

Hot Yoga @ the Black Cracker Field – 11:30am-1:30pm. Nature-based hot yoga class under the summer sun led by Ayodele Murphy featuring Ghosh and Kemeti yoga traditions. Bring your own mat, water and sunscreen. Sliding scale admission. Historic Hartnett Community Garden, 1401 Bridges Ave SW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Hot-Yoga-Black-Cracker-061326.

BREATH AND SOUND – "You Are the Medicine" – 3-5pm. Transformative re-birthing breathwork and gong sound experience supporting emotional release, nervous system healing and deep relaxation. Bring blankets, pillows and eye mask. \$55 preregister/\$65 door. Vista Yoga. bit.ly/Vista-Yoga.

SUNDAY, JUNE 14

The Silent Center: Breath, Ribs & Spine – 1:30-3pm. Six-week Feldenkrais series exploring breath, ribs and spine through gentle movement. Improve ease, mobility and awareness. Beginner friendly. In person and online via Zoom. \$240/series, \$40/drop-in. Vista Yoga, 2836 Lavista Rd, Decatur.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

Beginners Yoga Class – 6pm. Relaxed beginner yoga class featuring simple poses designed to increase flexibility, boost energy and help participants unwind in a welcoming environment. Bring a mat. From \$15. Kindred Healing Center, 1800 Jonesboro Rd SE, 4th Fl, Atlanta. bit.ly/Beginners-Yoga-Atlanta-061626.

THURSDAY, JUNE 18

Restorative Yoga – 7pm. Grounding restorative yoga session focused on deep rest and soothing the nervous system. Mats provided; bring a pillow and blanket. From \$12.51. Kindred Healing Center, 1800

CALENDAR

Jonesboro Rd SE, 4th Fl, Atlanta. bit.ly/Restorative-Yoga-Atlanta-061826.

SUNDAY, JUNE 21

Yoga & Sound Bath Experience – 4-5pm. Beginner-friendly restorative yoga flow with live singing bowls, gentle movement and guided meditation supporting relaxation, emotional release and nervous system balance. From \$10.73. 1800 Jonesboro Rd SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-Sound-Bath-062126.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

Reach and Release w/ Coach Angie Be – 10-11:30am. Community wellness event featuring yoga, breathwork and stress release in a supportive outdoor setting. Optional Reiki and total-body stretching available with \$10 love offering. Free. Wade Walker Park, 5585 Rockbridge Rd SW, Stone Mountain. bit.ly/Reach-And-Release-062726.

FRIDAY, JULY 3

FREE Trauma Informed Yoga – 10-11am. Gentle, trauma-informed yoga class for veterans and trauma survivors featuring mindful movement, breathwork and meditation in a supportive environment. Free. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development Inc., 27 Waddell St NE, Ste A, Atlanta. bit.ly/Trauma-Informed-Yoga-070326.

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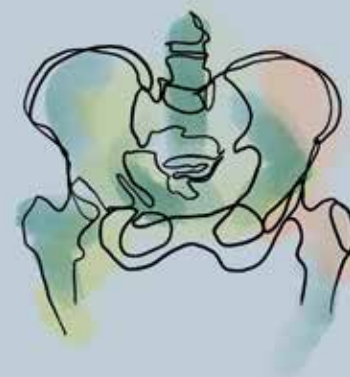
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Black Mental Health

History, Healing and Hope

by Trish Ahjel Roberts



From systemic racism and the stress and economic inequities it creates, to workplace microaggressions, to blatant police brutality, the Black community in the United States has always had to prioritize survival, both physically and mentally. Yet, while healthcare is a basic and ongoing necessity, many African Americans have learned to distrust the U.S. health system because history has shown them how often Black bodies have been exploited, experimented on, neglected and harmed under the banner of medical treatment and research.

Shifting Attitudes

Yet recent years have given rise to a massive uptick in conversations and resources supporting mental health in the Black community, in part driven by Black celebrities who have been impacted by mental health challenges in their own lives. In 2018, Oscar-nominated film and stage actor Taraji P. Henson launched the Boris

Lawrence Henson Foundation (BLHF), named after her late father, who struggled with untreated PTSD and bipolar disorder after serving as a Marine in the Vietnam War. Henson has spoken publicly about her own struggles with anxiety and depression and has tasked BLHF with the goal of “eradicating the mental health stigma in BIPOC communities.” Her organization partners with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as well as middle and high schools to offer programming that includes movement, breathwork, journaling and sound therapy.

In 2022, radio and TV personality Charlamagne tha God founded the Mental Wealth Alliance based on three pillars of programming: destigmatizing mental health in Black communities (teach), expanding the delivery of culturally competent mental health services (treat), and growing the pool of Black mental health practitioners (train). Charlamagne wrote

about his healing from trauma, anxiety and depression in his 2018 book, *Shook One*, in which he asks, “If you go to the gym three or four times a week, why can’t you put that same effort and energy into getting mentally strong?”

That same year, superstar rapper and entrepreneur Megan Thee Stallion launched *BadBitchesHaveBadDaysToo.com*, using the title of one of her hit songs as both the website name and a rallying cry. Reclaiming a word historically used to demean women, her website offers a rich wellness portal with resources for finding therapists, suicide prevention, substance abuse and specialized support for the Black and LG-BTQ+ community. Megan lost her father to a heart attack at age 15 and her mother to a brain tumor in 2019, when she was only 24. The year after her mother’s death was not only cloaked in the panic of the COVID-19 crisis, it was also the same year she was shot in the foot and endured a highly publicized trial and social media scrutiny. She shares her story in the 2024 documentary, *Megan Thee Stallion: In Her Words*.

Other pivotal moments of mental health awareness in the Black community were defined by female athletes. In 2021, 23-year-old tennis sensation Naomi Osaka withdrew from the French Open after being fined for missing a press appearance, citing her ongoing struggle with anxiety, depression and burnout. In her essay for *Time* magazine, “It’s O.K. Not To Be O.K.,” she recommended that players be allowed a small number of “sick days” per year. Her stand prompted the four Grand Slam organizations to address press conference mandates and restructure the way players are interviewed after matches.

That same year, Simone Biles withdrew from all events in the Tokyo Olympics except the balance beam, citing “twisties” – a lapse in mid-air spatial awareness often triggered by stress. By Paris 2024, she won three gold medals, proving that breaks for mental health can support long-term success. Her decision produced significant changes in the athletic community. Governing bodies, including USA Gymnastics,

began offering on-site therapists at competitions, and the NBA and NFL initiated broader conversations and resources.

In April, less than a month after an on-stage health scare left Megan Thee Stallion briefly hospitalized from exhaustion, and just one day after announcing her breakup from her NBA player boyfriend on Instagram, she ended her Broadway run in *Moulin Rouge! The Musical* early. She called it a “wake-up call.”

As high-profile Black celebrities “wake up” to self-compassion, wellness and self-care in greater numbers, they are leading the way for others in the Black community to shift from “pushing through” stress, trauma and struggle—by attempting to manage everything on their own— to pausing and getting help.

Black Mental Health Data Is Mixed

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Black American adults were 11 percent less likely than U.S. adults overall to report having a mental illness in the past year and 36 percent less likely to have received mental health treatment, indicating fewer reported incidences and disproportionately lower treatment rates. Even so, recent data indicates that African Americans were 37 percent less likely to die by suicide than the U.S. population overall.

What Atlanta Practitioners Say



Aprell Taylor is an LPC and certified school counselor. She helps her clients manage work stress, corporate gaslighting, the “angry black woman” trope and issues related to hormones and childbirth, including birth trauma, perimenopause and fibroids. The men she sees are often suffering from depression, manifesting as anger. She treats patients holistically, including conversations about diet and exercise.

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- Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective
Beam.community
- Charlamagne tha God Mental Wealth Alliance
MentalWealthAlliance.org
- Headway
headway.co
- Megan Thee Stallion's Bad Bitches Have Bad Days Too
BadBitcheshaveBadDaysToo.com
- Psychology Today Therapist Finder
Psychologytoday.com/us/therapists
- Tariji P. Henson's Boris L. Henson Foundation
BorisLHensonFoundation.org
- Therapy for Black Girls
TherapyForBlackGirls.com

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS (INSTAGRAM)

- Dr. Jay Barnett
[Instagram.com/KingJayBarnett](https://www.instagram.com/KingJayBarnett)
- Melanin and Mental Health | Eliza Boquin and Eboni Harris
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[Instagram.com/Minaa_B](https://www.instagram.com/Minaa_B)
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PROVIDERS

Andrea Bryant, LMFT
YouWellCollective.com

Aprell Taylor, LMFT, MDiv
YouWellCollective.com

Charmaine Mercer, PMHNP
TheWLWDJP.com

Christina Camp, PhD
CampPsychologist.com

J. Bernard Ma'at Kynes, LMFT
JamesBernardKynesSr.com

Nina Joy Mena, MD
DrNJoyLife.com

Tasha Fortenberry, LCSW
Sanadoras-Wellness.ueniweb.com

When asked why Black people are often reluctant to seek care, she said, “*Drapetomania* was a term used to describe slaves who wanted to run away. [Medical doctors] said it was madness to want to run away from your captor... From that standpoint... a lot of Black people are suspicious of medical doctors. *Why?* Because they like to experiment on us.”

Through her practice, Season 4 Change Counseling, Taylor offers a book club and couples intensives and will host an upcoming international retreat for educators in Panama. She accepts a wide variety of insurance carriers.



Tasha Fortenberry is an LCSW and Yoruba priest. Her practice, Sanadoras Wellness, treats clients suffering from anxiety, depression, PTSD,

personality disorders, grief from fertility issues and trauma from sexual abuse. About her Black male clients, she says, “There’s oftentimes this over-diagnosis around behavior—whether that is oppositional defiant or conduct disorder—when at the root of that often is trauma.”

Fortenberry helps clients by focusing on intergenerational patterns. “I notice that there are some women who do not have... aunts, grandmothers... that will help them be their best version of themselves.”

Fortenberry explains that the stigma around getting mental health assistance still exists in the Black community, often because of religion. “I’ve had some clients who have talked about being discouraged from therapy because the advice was to pray more about it... In the Yoruba tradition, there is a concept around what is called Ori, [which] translates as “head”... [It] gives us the direct connection to God. Sometimes, there may be this perception that as long as the person attends to their Ori... that may be the solution. But now... [the Yoruba community] has established a directory of licensed therapists.”

In addition to in-office and virtual sessions, Fortenberry offers home-based sessions for qualifying clients. She accepts several forms of insurance.



J. Bernard Ma’at Kynes is an LMFT and MDiv whose therapeutic practice was featured in the 2022 documentary film *Master of Light*. He facilitates groups in addition to his individual and couple sessions. He commonly works with people managing mid-life crisis, work issues, grief and family dynamics. He describes his groups as “More than just a support group... They’re able to allow more of the unconscious material to become conscious, and use it as a healing community for deeper traumatic wounds.”

Kynes acknowledged the trend in the Black community from believing church was the only solution to mental health issues to embracing therapy. He explained that he made the decision not to accept insurance because cognitive behavior therapists are often rationally trying to resolve problems, while his approach is integrative: rational, emotional and spiritual.

He offers a sliding scale for sessions and the ability to join economically priced weekly or bi-weekly groups.

His clients are uncovering their purpose. “I’m more than just a husband, or a wife, or a mother, or a son, or a daughter or an employee. Who am I at the core essence of my being? And that’s where the work comes in.”



Andrea Bryant is an LMFT, MDiv and Perinatal Mental Health Certified (PMH-C). Her group practice, YouWell Collective, focuses on helping clients unpack childhood trauma, improve relationships, enhance their sense of purpose and identity and manage the stress and anxiety often related to motherhood and entrepreneurship.

Bryant works with couples preparing for marriage and offers pre-marital counseling and intensives. “I use a program that my husband and I went through called SYMBIS—Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts. Each partner takes an assessment that produces... a very intensive report... I go through the report with the couple—typically... over a weekend. It’s an investment in your present and your future.”

While she does not accept insurance, Bryant offers sliding scale rates and partners with The Loveland Foundation, which provides up to 12 free therapy sessions for those who qualify. As her business expands, she plans to offer therapy packages to small and mid-size businesses.



Nina Joy Mena, MD, is a psychiatrist, motivational speaker, author and podcast host. She offers psychiatric assessments, medication management and therapy services for individuals and families. And while she treats patients with a variety of conditions, including anxiety, depression, trauma, burnout and ADHD, her practice focuses on joy and empowerment.

“What gives me hope is that more Black people are choosing healing instead of just survival. I’m seeing more conversations around boundaries, self-care, emotional intelligence, fatherhood, Black joy and generational healing. Social media, podcasts and public figures speaking openly about therapy have helped normalize seeking help.”

Dr. Mena authored *The NJoyNAL*, a “7-in-1 wellness journal” and therapy companion created to help people organize and balance their mental, physical, financial, aspirational and social wellness using her INSPIRE Joy Method. “I created it... for myself too, as someone balancing life as a wife, mom, psychiatrist, entrepreneur and woman with ADHD and anxiety.”

Mena is Chief Medical Officer for CHRIS 180, a nonprofit offering trauma-informed behavioral health services and support systems to underserved communities, including therapy, counseling, school-based support, safe housing, foster care and adoption placements.

Transformational Conversations

What is psychotherapy? In the space and place where I offer this art and gift of love and grace, psychotherapy is where transformational conversations take place. Conversations where others transparently reflect upon the existential pangs in their lives. Clients come for a deeper understanding of self, not to be fixed or judged. I listen and offer myself, with 30+ years of experience, with compassion and gratitude. Together, we both learn and grow as our conversation is guided by our hearts. Through transformational conversations, we heal deeper together.



J. Bernard Ma’at Kynes, M.Div., LMFT
ACPE Psychotherapist

Crossings Counseling Center

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According to Mena, “Healing doesn’t always mean the absence of struggle. Sometimes healing looks like finally setting boundaries, resting without guilt, asking for help, going to therapy, choosing joy intentionally or realizing you deserve peace, too.”

Feedback From The Community

Hope McDaniels, MD, an Atlanta physician, spoke of her experience working with Kynes. “Over the 10 years, I’ve become louder and gotten to know myself... There’s infinite things to learn about yourself, so there’s infinite possibilities and need for maintenance of therapy.”

Gregory Ellison, PhD, worked with Kynes nearly twice as long. “It’s almost like going to a psychological chiropractor, and just making sure that everything is aligned...”

A Fortenberry client who wishes to remain anonymous says, “I took a chance and I do not regret it... Tasha put words and techniques to things that I... couldn’t navigate in a healthy way... and held me accountable.”

The Path Forward

Acceptance of professional mental health care in the Black community has grown and continues to trend up. New media have brought healing off the therapeutic “couch” and into homes. Community organizations, group sessions and platforms like *Psychology Today’s* Therapist Finder and *BetterHelp.com* allow searching by racial identity. As conversations around emotional well-being become more visible and less stigmatized, Black people are redefining strength as the courage to seek healing. The path forward is not only about access to care, but about creating spaces where Black mental health is understood, honored and nurtured with compassion. 🌱

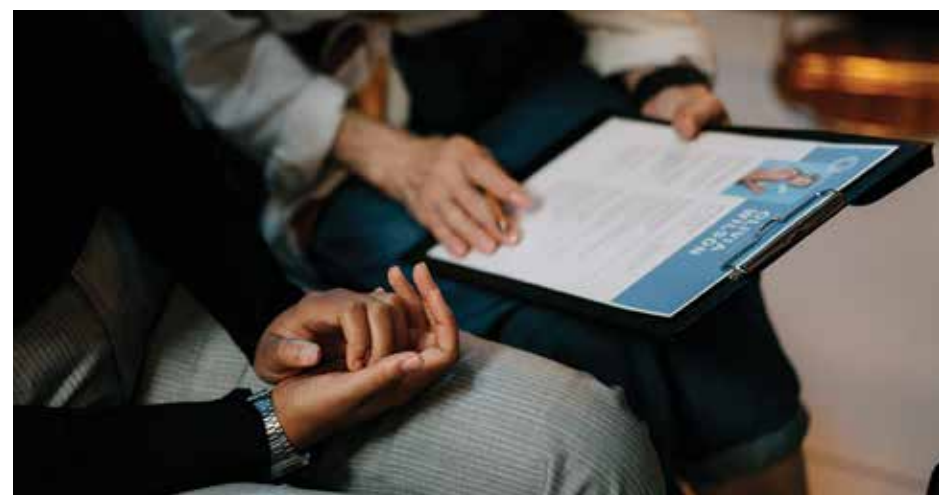


Trish Ahjel Roberts is a transformational coach, book and business mentor, yoga and meditation instructor and author of *Thinking Outside the Chrysalis: A Black Woman’s Guide to Spreading Her Wings*. Learn more at TrishAhjelRoberts.com.

From Graduation to Direction

A Guide for Navigating Life’s First Big Transition

by Linda Minnick



Alex Green/Pexels.com

Over the past few years, many professionals—especially those in coaching, counseling and wellness practices—have noticed a distinct shift: younger clients are seeking guidance in greater numbers. While every generation faces its own set of challenges, today’s graduates seem to be experiencing a unique kind of pressure. The transition from structured academic life to the wide-open landscape of adulthood can feel abrupt, overwhelming, and at times, isolating.

Graduation season, often portrayed as a time of celebration and accomplishment, can also bring an undercurrent of anxiety. The moment the cap is tossed into the air, reality sets in: *What comes next?* For many, the comfort of a defined path is suddenly replaced with uncertainty and expectation. Whether stepping into the workforce, pursuing further education, or simply trying to find direction, this transition can

feel like being pushed out of the nest—or the dorm room—before feeling fully ready to fly.

If you or someone you love is navigating this pivotal stage, here are a few grounding principles to help bring clarity, confidence and calm to the journey ahead.

1. GET CLEAR ON WHAT YOU WANT—NOT JUST WHAT YOU NEED

When beginning a job search, most people focus on practical needs: income, location and basic responsibilities. While these are essential, they are only part of the picture. True fulfillment comes from understanding not just what you *need*, but what you genuinely *want*.

Take time to create a detailed list of your ideal work environment and lifestyle. Consider questions like:

- Where do you want to live?

- Do you prefer working indoors or outdoors?
- Would you enjoy traveling for work?
- Do you thrive in a team setting or do you prefer working independently?
- What form of compensation motivates you—salary, hourly pay, commission or bonuses?

This exercise is more about developing awareness than about creating a rigid checklist. Your career isn’t separate from your life—it shapes how you spend your time, your energy and your sense of purpose. When you are aware of your preferences, you’re far more likely to recognize opportunities that align with your vision. On the other hand, if you don’t know what you’re looking for, it’ll be more difficult to recognize when you happen upon it.

2. EMBRACE THE POWER OF “NEXT”

One of the most common misconceptions among young professionals is the belief that their first major career decision must be the *right* one. It needs to be perfect. But that pressure can be paralyzing. The truth is, very few people follow a straight, uninterrupted path to their ideal career. Life is far more dynamic than that. Instead of searching for perfection, think in terms of progression. Think “next.”

Each job, each experience, each decision is simply a step forward. If you find yourself in a role that doesn’t quite fit, don’t view it as a failure. Instead, treat it as valuable feedback. What did you enjoy? What would you change? What surprised you? Then add these insights to your list of wants and needs. Over time, you’ll refine your direction with more clarity and confidence. Growth doesn’t come from getting it right the first time—it comes from staying open, curious and willing to adjust course.

3. DON’T FORGET TO BREATHE

It may sound overly simple, but it’s one of the most overlooked tools for managing stress and making clear decisions: Breathe.

Periods of transition often come with heightened anxiety. The pressure to suc-

ceed, meet expectations and “figure it all out” can create a constant sense of urgency. But decisions made in a state of stress are rarely the best ones.

When you feel overwhelmed, pause. Take a few slow, intentional breaths. Step away from the noise—both internal and external. Give yourself permission to slow down. Clarity comes from calm, not chaos. By grounding yourself in the present moment, you allow your mind to reset and your perspective to expand. From that place, even the biggest decisions begin to feel more manageable.

4. TRUST THE JOURNEY, EVEN WHEN IT’S NOT LINEAR

There’s a timeless truth often attributed to ancient wisdom: Each of us is here to live a meaningful, fulfilling life. For some, that path is clear from the beginning. For others, it unfolds gradually, through exploration, trial and even missteps. Both paths are valid.

If you don’t yet know exactly what you’re “meant to” do, you’re not behind—you’re simply in the process of discovering. Don’t let fear hold you back from pursuing what excites or inspires you. Dreams often require adjustment, patience and persistence, but they are worth the effort.

Actor Jim Carrey once said, “You can fail at what you don’t love. So you might as well take a chance at doing what you love.” Playing it safe is not a guarantee of success or happiness. Taking thoughtful risks, however, opens the door to possibility.

This season isn’t about having all the answers. It’s about learning how to ask the right questions—and having the courage to follow where they lead. 🌱



Linda Minnick is a speaker, author, life coach and Preferred PSYCH-K facilitator. She lives in Roswell with her husband, John. Her most recent

book, *New Day, New Life*, can be found on bit.ly/minnick-new-day.

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Wise Words



Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi

on Cultivating Compassion and Connection

by Diane Eaton and Paul Chen



Photo: Timothy B. Hussey, Jr.

witnessing the suffering of others and [the motivation] to alleviate it. ... We don't really see compassion limited to action itself. It's more of an inner state that leads you to a helping action.

Can you tell us a bit about your training in compassion as a Buddhist monk?

I was trained as a Buddhist monk from age 14 in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. It's an ancient Nalanda curriculum that our monasteries follow. In it, there's quite an extensive study of what is called bodhicitta, which means the altruistic intention to attempt a wakeful awakening of the Buddhahood to help all beings. And of course, compassion is the root of such altruistic intention.

So, tell us what CBCT is.

It's basically an analytical approach to expanding and deepening compassion. ... It is grounded in a model [that reveals that] your perspective—when it is not just borrowed or book knowledge, not just intellectual, but when it's met first with critical insights—then those perspectives lead to shifts in your emotions and feelings, and emotions and feelings are what shape your behavior and actions. ... But how do we expand that to strangers, or perhaps even those who you don't agree with? ...

There are two pillars for deepening and expanding compassion. One is ... when you can see others—whether it's a stranger or even somebody whose behavior or attitudes you don't agree with—as someone like you, who is also a human being with basic needs, physical, emotional needs, just like [yourself]. ... There's a different set of feelings [you have] when you bring your attention to those shared human conditions, the reality that they too, are beings just like [you], with certain human limitations, but also dreams, goals and the fundamental aspirations, to be happy and free from suffering—just like you. ... As the primatologist Frans de Waal says, identification is the primary portal for empathy.

Another major pillar is when we see that others make a difference in our own lives ... that naturally unleashes gratitude. When someone even gives you a genuine smile, it leads to a certain feeling of warmth toward that person ... and your relationship to this person changes. ... This cognitive, analytical approach ... is to make visible, first of all, our shared human reality, and secondly, to make visible the ways that we depend on others, that we are interdependent. ...

Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, PhD is the co-founder and executive director of the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics at Emory University, and founder and spiritual director of Drepung Loseling. Last month he released his book *Engaged Compassion: Seven Practices to Cultivate Resilience, Connection, and a Joyous Life*. It is a secular training manual in developing compassion, based on Buddhist principles, and reflects the work he's been engaged in for the last 20-plus years: teaching compassion to all those who wish to learn. Publisher Paul Chen interviewed him about the book, and managing editor Diane Eaton edited.

First, if you would, please define compassion for us.

Of course. Compassion can be understood in many different ways, and different scholars and people explain it differently. But in CBCT, cognitively based compassion training, or from the tradition that I come from, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, you can simply define it as a warm-hearted concern unfolding from

As long as it remains just content knowledge, it would not change in your feelings. But when it becomes our personalized insight, ... the “aha” moment when you get it, it’s accompanied [by] a certain change in our feeling. [But,] that aha moment, felt awareness, that can remain only momentary unless you ... repeat it, bring that conclusion home again and again. ... By attuning to that awareness again and again, [it] can become more second nature.

Please briefly tell us how you came to develop CBCT.

In the 90s, His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Emory, and his talks focused on the need to educate heart and mind. ... That really resonated with Emory leadership and led to the development of its close collaboration with the Dalai Lama. When they invited [him] in 1988 to deliver the commencement speech ... one thing that particularly resonated with the community, and was picked up by media quite extensively, was his focus on compassion. ...

Then, in 2003, I was offering courses [at Emory] in Tibetan Buddhism, and one of them was The Psychology of Enlightenment. ... One of my students ... encouraged me to develop a program that can be offered to the community and the students. And that was really the impetus for developing CBCT.

How far is its reach these days?

There are [now] instructors teaching in 27 countries. ... And certainly, it would be at least half a million people around the world who have been exposed to these courses. ... In 2019, we began to create the manuals and the related materials to scale it. Last fall, we launched a digital learning program called Compassion U, and it’s still being developed in different languages.

About how many teachers do you have?

I would say at least 300 teachers.

Tell us about the benefits of CBCT.

I think that the top [one] would be managing our stress. ... Our initial study was [launched] because of rising mental health

problems and to see if CBCT can help buffer that by simply helping [freshman college] students cope with their challenges a little bit better. And that study with the students demonstrated that when students practice what we call the “high practice”—about 90 minutes per week on average— it showed that when they are subjected to some kind of social stress test, [they had] significantly lower IL-6, an immune stress marker, [which] is very highly correlated with modern day problems like depression, anxiety and so forth. But it also showed that when students who practiced are subjected to social stress tests, ... of course [their cortisol] spikes, ... but it drops down much faster than the [control] group. That is a measure of resilience. [There are also] measures showing that people have more compassion for themselves [from practicing CBCT]. In their ups and downs, they are more gentle with themselves, more kind, more compassionate, which, in today’s society [is important because] so many people are struggling with self-blame, erosion of self-worth and more. ... And then it is also shown that people who [practice CBCT] have a greater sense of gratitude. If social connection is an important predictor of our well-being, gratitude brings that sense of tender connection with others.

What’s important to know about outcomes of CBCT?

[There have been studies] measuring the actual biomarkers—like immune stress markers, ... and also cortisol, the stress hormone. Those were quite significant.... One [published study] did what is called the Reading the Mind in the Eyes, where [participants] are shown just [someone’s] eyes, and then asked to figure out what

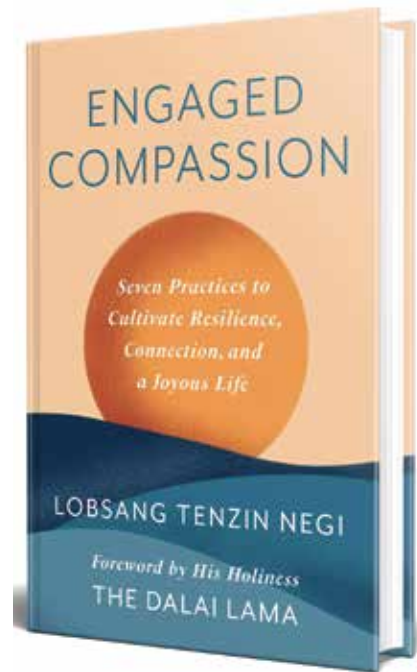
emotion [the person is] experiencing. ... By seeing someone’s eyes, if you can pick up what they are experiencing, that means that you have better interpersonal skills, like that. So, in the comparison group, their accuracy was much higher than the control group. ... But [more than that,] there are parts of the brain that are associated with empathy, [and the research] showed that in the compassion group, the brain circuits associated with empathy also had greater activity. So not only [are they reporting] which emotions [the other person was] experiencing, but also in their own brain, their empathy-related activation was also higher.

[In another study, one group of medical students] was given a 10-week course, and another group was waitlisted. ... In medi-

cal school, it’s been clear that second-year students’ compassion levels decrease... and the third year, it really tanks. ... And depression and mental health issues begin to increase. So in this study, in the control [group], you see the decline. But in the compassion group, if anything, actually, there’s a slight increase. ... It’s very important, because [numerous studies have shown that] compassion does matter in the health-care [industry] because

greater compassion protects the healthcare practitioners from getting burned out. It leads to better patient outcomes. Even from the bottom of the organization, financially, it’s been shown [to increase] income. ... Studies show that declining compassion in doctors and [others] really affects their quality of work and the quality of their own health.

Your book has many examples of people who have taken the course



and have benefited from it. Can you share one of those with us?

Yeah. One of the most powerful experiences for me personally was when I visited a hospital in India called the Siddh Public Hospital. CBCT was introduced to [everyone there,] from the CEO to gatekeeper and parking lot manager, janitors and like that. It was the most moving experience for me to visit and see them speaking about what it meant for them. [Many had] tears in their eyes. ... One doctor just really dreaded going to work. ... But then, after [CBCT,] he says that ... even when he finishes work early, he stays there to see if other doctors need help. And then ... instead of everyone just leaving, they created a room for their Kirat game. ... It has improved their family dynamics as well.

Before this introduction of [CBCT], [the hospital] was ranked at the bottom in the state. But after two years ... it received several awards, including the best hospital award. [But] what was most powerful for me was when the nurses, the gatekeeper, they’re talking about how it has changed their experience at work. For me personally, hearing stories like that is very, very rewarding.

You’ve been teaching CBCT for about two decades. Why is the book just coming out now?

Yes, that’s a good question. I mean, we do have the [CBCT] guidebooks for the general public, tailored for healthcare businesses and leadership and educators. But the book itself. ... I was offering a course in CBCT in Michigan, and somebody who is in the publishing business said, “You got to write this book,” and gave encouragement. I’m not really a writer, per se, ... but it’s with the encouragement from friends that it’s finally coming out.

How would you respond to Elon Musk, who said, “The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy.” Or to the pastor of Grace City Church, Josh McPherson, who says that empathy is dangerous

and toxic, and it will align you with hell?

I think you know that science shows the value of empathy. When you think about [the late] France DeVol, one of our colleagues from Emory, who has been an extraordinary primatologist, whose writings, whose works have transformed the way we understand human nature—he [brought] some real rigorous science to show how empathy is the key to our social life. We are special beings. If we are out of touch with other people’s needs, feelings and so forth, how are we going to live together and interact in a meaningful way? ... The new science is showing the old thinking—that competition is what has driven our evolution—is not [the case.] The research is actually showing that cooperation has been the key driver of our evolution.

... So empathy, compassion, it’s what promotes trust, and that trust promotes cooperation, and the cooperation is the key for us, as a society, as a group, as a community, to survive and flourish. So this idea that empathy is an obstacle for our progress, our well-being, I think that it comes from a misunderstanding of what compassion is. ... Empathy is what moves you to help others. What moves you—whether it’s emotional empathy, resonating with someone’s pain, or cognitive empathy, that understanding what others may be struggling with—when it is grounded in our sense of meaningful connection, this tenderness, warmth, feeling towards others, that it will naturally draw our attention to others. ... I would say that our human society is based on reciprocity. For us, this capacity to empathize with others is very important.

How can our Atlanta readers find out more about CBCT?

In Atlanta, we offer [in-person] CBCT courses every year. If they go to the website, [compassion.emory.edu], they can see when those courses are being offered. They can also subscribe to our mailing list. 📧

Engaged Compassion: Seven Practices to Cultivate Resilience, Connection and a Joyous Life by Negi is now available at bit.ly/engaged-compassion.

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, June 6

The Self Care Lab Walk Club – 8:30am. Weekly wellness walk along the Atlanta BeltLine focused on movement, self-care and community connection. Meet outside Krog Street Market. Free. Atlanta BeltLine Eastside Trail, Atlanta. bit.ly/Self-Care-Lab-Walk-060626.

Wellness Driven. Resilience Built. – 10-11:30am. Wellness workshop focused on coping with trauma, building resilience and supporting mental well-being. Features keynote speaker Leslie Sanders. Free; donuts provided. 5000 Austell Powder Springs Rd, Ste 251, Austell. bit.ly/Wellness-Driven-Resilience-060626.

Black Moms Wellness Walk Meet Up – 10:30am-noon. Community wellness walk featuring connection, movement and stress relief for Black moms. Includes mingling at the farmers market and a relaxed 3.5-mile park walk. Free. Brook Run Park, 4770 N Peachtree Rd, Dunwoody. bit.ly/Black-Moms-Wellness-Walk-061026.

Healing Sound Bath with Raye Andrews – 11 am-12 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. No registration required. Suggested love offering \$20-\$40. Held in the Chapel. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Atlanta Safe Space Saturday – 11am-4pm. Mental wellness field day for teens ages 13-17 and parents featuring workshops, movement, relay races and community connection in a supportive environment. Free. 352 University Ave SW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Safe-Space-Atlanta-060626.

Tea Thyme: Herbs for Summer Wellness – 12-1pm. Learn about cooling, hydrating herbal teas traditionally used to ease inflammation, reduce stress and support mental clarity during summer heat. Free; registration required. Oyon Botanical Gardens, 3353 Washington Rd, East Point. bit.ly/Tea-Thyme-Summer-Wellness-060626.

Sunday, June 7

Gentle Stretching And Breath-Work: Mind-Body Connection Through Movement – 10am. Free community class blending gentle stretching, breathwork, meditation, yoga, Tai Chi and Qigong practices for relaxation and wellness. Ages 16+. Body & Brain Yoga and Tai Chi Decatur, 308 W Ponce de Leon Ave, Decatur. 678-750-3246. bit.ly/Gentle-Stretching-Breath-Work-060726.

Sunday Morning Yoga @ The Interlock – 10am. Free all-levels community yoga series featuring movement, mindfulness and connection led by rotating instructors. Bring a mat, water and towel. Free. The Interlock, 1115 Howell Mill Rd NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-At-The-Interlock-060726.

Wednesday, June 10

Mocha Mom Wellness Walk Wednesdays – 8:30am. Midweek wellness walk for moms featuring fresh air, movement and connection with other moms in a relaxed outdoor setting. Free. Cauley Creek Park, 7255 Bell Rd, Johns Creek. bit.ly/Mocha-Mom-Wellness-Walk-061026.

Scan for upcoming events:

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The Crest Walkers – 9am. Community walking club promoting better health, movement and connection through group walks and supportive conversation. Free. Browns Mill Recreation Center, 5101 Browns Mill Rd, Stonecrest. bit.ly/Stonecrest-Walkers-061026.

Waistee Girls Wellness Walk Wednesdays – 6pm. Weekly beginner-friendly 3-mile wellness walk for women featuring movement, connection and community along the Atlanta BeltLine. Free. Meet at Willy's Mexicana Grill & Howlin' Willy's, 1071 Piedmont Ave NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Waistee-Girls-Walk-061026.

The Art of Breathing – 6:30pm. Interactive workshop featuring breathwork and meditation techniques designed to reduce anxiety, ease stress and promote mental calm. Led by certified Art of Living instructors. Free. Toco Hill-Avis G. Williams Library, 1282 McConnell Dr, Decatur. bit.ly/Art-Of-Breathing-Workshop-061026.

Saturday, June 13

Yoga for Readers – 10-11am. Gentle, beginner-friendly yoga practice focused on relieving tension from reading and screen time. Led by yoga educator Lisa W. Free. Kiss and Tale Romance Bookshop, 340 W Ponce de Leon Ave, Ste 202, Decatur. bit.ly/Yoga-Readers-Decatur-061326.

Uhuru African Dance Class – 10am. Energetic West African dance class for all ages featuring traditional dances from Guinea, Senegal, Mali and Ivory Coast taught to live drums. Beginner through advanced levels welcome. From \$7.18. DATE Academy Gym, 1492 Kelton Dr, Stone Mountain. bit.ly/Uhuru-Dance-Class-061326.

Sunday, June 14

The Collective Pulse: A Serenity Sunday Wellness Social – 5-7pm. Reset your nervous system with somatic heart-opening flow led by Ouida Brown-Lyons, followed by adaptogen mocktails, functional bites, connection and raffle. The Hotel at Avalon, 9000 Avalon Blvd, Alpharetta. bit.ly/Serenity-Sunday-061426.

With Ease: A Nervous System Reset Through Breath & Movement – 6pm. Guided breathwork and gentle movement experience using Somato Respiratory Integration to support nervous system regulation, relaxation and body awareness. \$25. Holistic Alignment Strategies, 3475 Dallas Hwy, Bldg 400, Ste 425, Marietta. bit.ly/Breath-Movement-Reset-061426.

Wednesday, June 17

Free Tai Chi Session in East Cobb! – 6-7pm. Beginner-friendly Tai Chi session featuring gentle movement, mindfulness and stress relief in a welcoming community setting. All ages and fitness levels welcome. Free. 4814 Paper Mill Rd SE, Marietta. bit.ly/Free-Tai-Chi-East-Cobb-061726.

EARTHSTRONG Vol 4: A KHöNA Yoga Series | powered by lululemon – 6:30pm. Outdoor yoga series featuring movement, meditation, breathwork and sound healing led by Shelby Adina. Complimentary tea while supplies last. Free. Ponce City Market, 675 Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/EarthStrong-Yoga-Series-061726.

Thursday, June 18

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. No registration required. Suggested love offering \$20-\$40. Held in the Chapel. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org

Friday, June 19

Walk & Talk w/ Grief – 6:30-7:30pm. Gentle community walk offering space for reflection, conversation and connection around grief, loss and life transitions. Includes hot cocoa and guided reflection prompts. Free. 500 S Columbia Dr, Decatur. bit.ly/Walk-Talk-Grief-061926.

Psychic Development Series
Saturday, June 20 – 10:30am-5:30pm
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bit.ly/PsyDevPS

Tuesday, June 23

Energy Healing Circle – 7-8 pm. Join us for a time of prayer, reflection, and music as we affirm the healing power of inner peace and the eternal gift of grace. Led by Rev. Jennifer L. Sacks. Music by Simon Needle, Director of Music. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org. pm

Saturday, June 27

MOVE WITH LIM - FREE Monthly Movement with the LIM WELLNESS CLUB – 10am. Free all-levels community workout focused on fitness, movement and connection led by LIM Wellness Club board member Kariim Smith. Free. 1311 Marietta Blvd NW, Unit A, Atlanta. bit.ly/Move-With-Lim-062726.

Men Only: Move With Ease : Pilates For Arthritis Relief – 3:30-5pm. Beginner-friendly Pilates class designed to improve

mobility, reduce joint pain and support arthritis relief through gentle movement. Refreshments and wellness gift bags included. Free. Cerene Core Studio, 455 Glynn St S, Ste 208, Fayetteville. bit.ly/Mens-Pilates-Arthritis-062726.

Sunday, June 28

Spiritual Keys to Aging Well – 12:30-1:30 pm. This monthly discussion group meets the last Sunday of the month to focus on topics of interest to aging adults. All are welcome. No registration required. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Monday, June 29

Healing With Sound – 5-6pm. Experience the calming power of sound therapy designed to relax, heal and rejuvenate mind and body in a supportive environment filled with soothing vibrations and positive energy. Free. Southern Lotus Yoga, 2137 Hwy 155 N, McDonough. bit.ly/Sound-Therapy-Session-062926.

Introduction to Transmission Meditation – 7:30pm. Available online through Eventbrite. Free. Sponsored by Share International USA. 770-302-2208. Info-se@share-international.us. Register: Tinyurl.com/85jfcdex.

Tuesday, June 30

Mindfulness with Walk for Peace Buddhist monk at Grant Park Meditation – 7:30-9pm. Special meditation session featuring mindfulness of breathing, guided meditation and Dharma teachings led by Venerable Phra Ajarn Maha Dam Phommasan. Donations appreciated. Chua Quang Minh, 1168 Benteen Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Buddhist-Monk-Mindfulness-063026.

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, Crosse and Brunch. Via Zoom or in person. 3420 W Hospital Ave, Ste 102, Chamblee. More info: RedClaySangha.org.

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

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

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

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

Unity Atlanta Church Sunday Services – 11am-12pm. 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 held in-person 11am-12pm for ages 5-18. Nursery service is available 10:30am-12:30pm. 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Twin Hearts Meditation – 11.00 am – 12.00 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.

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. Efrain 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.

"Divine Connection" (Conexión Divina) Zoom Gathering – 8-9pm. The Spanish-speaking community is invited to this Zoom prayer and study group, led by Rev. Xiomara Malagon. April features the Unity Booklet "The Power of Faith to Heal." For more info and to receive the Zoom link, email: xiomara735@gmail.com. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org

WEDNESDAYS

Meditation & Modern Buddhism – 7:00-8:15 pm. With Resident Teacher, Gen Kel-

sang Dechok. Talks, guided meditation, discussion and Q&A. All welcome. Kadampa Meditation Center Georgia, 741 Edgewood NE, Atlanta. 678-453-6753. MeditationInGeorgia.org.

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

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.

THURSDAYS

Beyond Limits Weekly Conscious Dance – Between 8pm in Smyrna and 7 pm 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.

Inside Flow Yoga – 10-11am, Lift Yoga Dunwoody, \$20. Vinyasa style yoga that merges breath, movement and music. With Inside Flow, awareness draws inward, expression comes outward, and the practice becomes a shared experience. www.emilyflows.com to resister and for more info

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

SATURDAYS

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

Oakhurst Farmers Market – 9am-1pm. Year-round. Fresh produce, meat, baked treats, and more. Additional offerings include live music and chef demonstrations featuring seasonal recipes. Sceptre Brewing Arts, 630 E Lake Dr, Decatur. cfmatl.org/oakhurst.

Free 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.

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Despite It All, A Song

by Tommy Housworth



David Kanigan/Pexels.com

Spring invites such promise and hope. It's a time of birth and rebirth, and when a pair of finches began building a nest on the inside lip of our front porch, my wife and I were thrilled. It was just a matter of days before we heard the peeping of baby birds greeting the world.

After a particularly challenging winter—harsh weather and harsher headlines—we welcomed the notion of new life. Over a week or two of birdsong, Mom and Dad fed their newborns and taught them how to navigate life before nudging them from the nest and into the world. Many mornings, we sat outside with our coffee and watched from the corner of our eye as we read. The nest was a sturdy architecture of stick and brush, resting atop a vacant wasps' nest, of all things. Perhaps it was the ideal foundation, or a message to predators: Don't mess with our nest.

The morning we first heard the baby birds' cries was heartwarming. We opted to give Mom and Dad space and stay inside, attempting to sneak a peek from the window on our landing. My wife even dug out our binoculars, despite the nest being no more than ten feet from the window. We spotted a head or two bobbing above the top of the nest and, of course, heard the unmistakable

sound of hungry babies, seeking the sustenance that only their parents could provide.

Perhaps that's where things went wrong. At some point, Mom and Dad must've left their babies unattended, because a hush came over the nest. We weren't sure who the perpetrator was, but we assumed it was a blue jay since we see a lot of them in our yard. For all their regal beauty, blue jays can be real jerks. I was attacked more than once at our home in Decatur by a possessive blue jay who thought my presence was a threat to her nest. Respecting the nests of others should be a given, but—until further evidence is offered—we are placing blame for this tragic disappearance at the three-toed feet of the *Cyanocitta cristata*.

While we never saw what happened, the nest's silence was deafening, and the heartbreak of seeing Mom and Dad return to the nest and cry out for their babies was unshakeable.

As I watched them—their bewilderment, their sadness—I thought about how half-empty the metaphoric glass has felt for quite some time. I felt it for myself, but also for so many people I love and so many whom I read about in the news each day. The unhoused people at the mission down the street from us. The barefoot man outside of Walmart with a handwritten sign and most of his possessions in a grocery cart. Discouragement, it seemed, had become my default mode after a lifetime of being fairly hopeful.

I carried that grim assessment around with me for a day or two. After all, I wasn't finding much evidence to the contrary. Perhaps hard times and brutal truths were just the order of the day going forward. Perhaps I needed to shift my state to one slightly harder, a bit less hopeful. It was, after all, pragmatic to anticipate the worst, right? That's how our ancestors survived, after all. Expect the tiger beyond the trees, the bear behind every bush.

Then, I went outside with my book and coffee on Saturday morning, and there the father bird was. Still mourning his lost children, he flew from our porch to the wire above our driveway. There, he began to sing the loveliest of songs. It wasn't a dirge, but a melodious recital. If one didn't know his backstory, they might think it was a song of pure joy. Aware of his pain, what I heard was a song of defiant hope. A sound etched in a belief that he must do what he was put here to do: sing. And then, take flight.

And so he did. And with him went my notion that life is out to get us. That harsh lie was replaced by a song. A promise to myself: Sing, despite it all. 🐦



Tommy Housworth is a professional writer, creative director for corporate projects, a certified mindfulness instructor and the author of two collections of short stories. *A Sense of Wonder* is his Substack column.



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