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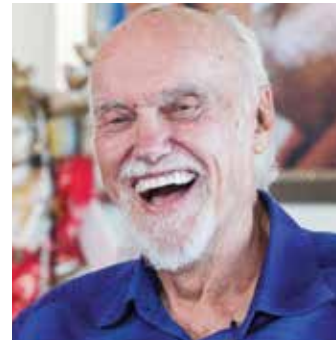
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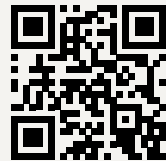
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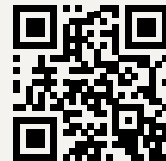
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Correction: In our June issue, the information provided for Aprell Taylor in the resource listing for Black Mental Health was incorrect. Ms. Taylor is an LPC, her business is Season for Change Counseling, and its website is Season4ChangeCounseling.com.

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# Get Healthier? Get Outside

Our lead article this month is all about how being outdoors contributes to our well-being. Unfortunately, I would be one of the first to raise my hand acknowledging that I spend way, way too much time sitting at a desk and staring at screens.

While Marlaina Donato's article provides several terrific examples and reasons for outdoor wellness practices, I've accumulated several more over the last year or so to encourage me to get out more. They have not worked as well as I would like, unfortunately, but, hey, there's always tomorrow.

We all know that sunshine provides us with vitamin D. Ultraviolet B radiation, the type that triggers vitamin D production, is strongest when the sun is at its zenith, around noon. Science recommends getting midday sun two to four times a week, for 5 to 30 minutes, with limbs exposed.

But are you aware that morning sun helps sync your circadian rhythm with daytime activity and nighttime sleep? That's useful to many, because we modern folk are certainly out of sync with all that artificial light all the time. The dosing advice here is to spend 10 to 30 minutes in the morning sun soon after waking. Ayurveda tells us that our bodies enter optimal healing mode from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. and recommends sleeping for most of that period. Getting morning sun will help with that bedtime goal.

Finally, the popular Indian spiritual teacher Sadhguru says that sunlight "creates substantial bursting energy in the system," something that helps us make plans for our lives and helps us pursue those plans. "We're essentially solar-powered," he says, encouraging all to have sunlight bathe us every day.

Holistic health advocates promote grounding, or *earthing*, to help reduce inflammation and stress and improve sleep and circulation. Earthing is the practice of having direct contact with the earth by walking barefoot, working one's hands in the soil, or lying on the ground. The limited research on the subject has shown promising results, but, as with so many things holistic in nature, more in-depth research is needed for science to confirm its proclaimed benefits.

Another healthy practice is walking for 10 minutes at a moderate pace within 30 minutes of consuming a meal. Significant research demonstrates the benefit of doing so: It dampens glucose spikes, thereby reducing the amount of insulin your body needs to manage the impact of meals. When you walk, your muscle contractions pull glucose out of the bloodstream through pathways that don't entirely rely on insulin. One 2016 study of adults with type 2 diabetes found that taking a 10-minute walk soon after dinner reduced participants' overall post-dinner glucose rise by about 22% compared to walking for 30 minutes at another time of day.

Finally, in addition to getting outdoors, one can bring the outdoors inside and reap benefits as well.

"Biophilic design is the intentional integration of nature and natural patterns into buildings and spaces to improve human health, well-being, and creativity," states the *Journal of Biophilic Design*. "It uses natural light, greenery, water, natural materials, and patterns found in nature to create environments where people thrive."

Research supports these benefits of biophilic design: reduced stress, improved mood, better perceived comfort and modest productivity gains. Several studies focused on the presence of plants, whether indoors or easily seen through windows. In 2014, the "green office" study by Marlon Nieuwenhuis and colleagues compared productivity rates in bare offices vs. offices with plants. The latter saw, on average, 15 percent higher productivity rates.

While it might seem there's a lot here, outdoor practices can easily overlap. For example, after a meal, walk barefoot on a field for 10 minutes, in shorts and a sleeveless shirt. Sounds simple enough. I should try it tomorrow! 🌿



*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.*



*DashaPixels.com*



## BE Vitalized Adds ExoMind Technology



*Courtesy of BE Vitalized & Energized Wellness Center*

BE Vitalized & Energized Wellness Center recently added ExoMind technology to its wellness services. The non-invasive sessions take less than 30 minutes and support brain wellness, cognitive performance, relaxation and overall well-being.

"EXOMIND provides a non-invasive way to help people feel more focused, rested, balanced, and capable of showing up fully in their lives," says Deborah Haynes, RN, founder and CEO of the company, who has more than 40 years' experience in healthcare. "Throughout my career as a former oncology nurse and healthcare executive, I have witnessed the growing impact of stress, anxiety, poor sleep, mental fatigue and over-

whelm on people's lives," Haynes says. "While many wellness solutions focus on the body, I believe we must also support the brain—the organ that influences every thought, decision, emotion and action."

ExoMind is an FDA-cleared brain stimulation technology that uses transcranial magnetic stimulation to stimulate specific areas of the brain. The technology supports neural activity and neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to adapt and form new neural connections.



*Courtesy of BE Vitalized & Energized Wellness Center*

*Deborah Haynes*

BE Vitalized & Energized integrates its non-invasive wellness technologies with personalized coaching to support energy, resilience, cognitive performance, stress recovery, sleep quality and overall well-being. The cost for four and six weekly sessions is \$2,000 and \$3,000, respectively.

*For more information, visit [BeVitalizedAndEnergized.com](http://BeVitalizedAndEnergized.com) or call 770-676-6177. BE Vitalized & Energized Wellness Center is located at 700 Old Roswell Lakes Parkway, Suite 110, in Roswell.*

## HALO Salt Opens in Marietta

HALO Salt + Energy Studio opened on June 6 in Marietta, offering the city's first immersive Himalayan salt room experience.

The studio, which is located inside Hart Chiropractic and Wellness just off the square, offers salt therapy, an infrared sauna, a restorative recovery lounge, energy balancing, intuitive wellness sessions, workshops, classes and wellness experiences offered both in person and online.

In the salt room, visitors breathe pharmaceutical-grade salt particles dispersed into the air. Salt therapy, also known as halotherapy, is used to support respiratory health, skin wellness, relaxation and overall well-being.

"HALO Salt + Energy Studio has been thoughtfully designed as a sanctuary for those seeking relief from stress, overwhelm, fatigue and the demands of modern life," says founder India Leigh. "We wanted to create a space where people could step away from the noise of daily life, take a deep breath and reconnect with themselves."

HALO Salt + Energy Studio partners with Hart Chiropractic and Wellness to expand the range of wellness services available to the



*Courtesy of HALO Salt + Energy Studio*

Marietta community, complementing their current chiropractic, acupuncture and massage offerings. "As we continue to grow our vision for whole-person wellness, HALO brings a new dimension of care to our patients and community," says Dr. Rob Hart of Hart Chiropractic and Wellness.

*For more information, call 770-380-7906 or visit [HaloSaltEnergyStudio.com](http://HaloSaltEnergyStudio.com). HALO Salt + Energy Studio is located at 216 Washington Avenue in Marietta.*



## Ted Turner Remembered for Conservation Work

Ted Turner (1938-2026), founder of CNN and a major Atlanta sports/media/business figure, died May 6 at age 87, leaving a conservation legacy tied to land protection, species restoration and environmental philanthropy.

Turner helped pioneer large-scale private land conservation in the United States, especially through the use of privately owned ranchland for habitat restoration, bison recovery, endangered species programs and conservation easements. His conservation work covered more than 3,000 square miles of ranchland and included habitat restoration, species recovery and sustainable ecotourism, according to the Associated Press.

In 1990, he founded the Turner Foundation, further supporting land conservation, air and water quality and climate protection. Its environmental work includes protecting wildlife habitat, restoring private and public lands and supporting a transition to



Ted Turner

Photo: Bernard Gotfryd

cleaner energy sources that reduce climate-related pollution.

In 1997, Turner established the Turner Endangered Species Fund to help restore endangered and imperiled species on Turner ranches and in partnership with state and federal agencies. His family office says his broader conservation work preserved more than two million acres of land and helped protect and recover imperiled species, including wolves, black-footed ferrets, tortoises and other wildlife.

The National Wildlife Federation recognized Turner with its Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021 for habitat conservation and wildlife recovery work. “From buffalo to whooping cranes to black-footed ferrets, Ted Turner worked at the forefront of ensuring our wildlife heritage will endure for future generations,” says Collin O’Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.

## Greenhouse Initiative Seeks Sustainable Growers

The Griffin Greenhouse Opportunity is seeking potential partners with growers, farmers, educators, nonprofit organizations and agricultural entrepreneurs who are interested in cultivating sustainable food systems and community-centered agriculture in Griffin, Georgia. Atlanta-based entrepreneur Vik Thadani owns the 7.34-acre property, which features existing greenhouse infrastructure and is available immediately for lease, partnership or collaborative development.

Thadani acquired the land in 2021 and had used the greenhouse to raise tropical plants before opening the property for this new initiative. The opportunity is designed to support agricultural uses such as specialty crop production, plant nurseries, educational programming, community-supported agriculture, workforce development initiatives and projects that promote environmental stewardship, food access and sustainable growing practices.

Organizers say the opportunity comes at a time when consumers are increasingly seeking local food sources, sustainable agriculture practices and ways to reconnect with nature and their communities. Many aspiring growers and agricultural entrepreneurs face barriers related to land costs, greenhouse infrastructure and startup expenses.

“We see this as an opportunity to cultivate more than plants,” says Terra Martinez, Griffin Greenhouse Opportunity representative. “We hope to connect with individuals and organizations who are passionate about sustainability, education, local food systems and community impact.”



*There is no cost to inquire. Lease terms and partnership arrangements will be discussed based on the needs and goals of prospective operators. For more information, call 404-804-0320 or email Terra@ThadaniHouse.com. Griffin Greenhouse Opportunity is located at 914 Swint Road in Griffin.*

## Metaphysical Shops Feature Local Artists

### Dianne McAlexander at The Well of Roswell



Becoming Queen

The Well of Roswell presents an exhibit entitled “An Ecology of Women,” by Georgia artist Dianne McAlexander, from June 14 through September 14. Her work explores feminine presence, dignity, emotional truth and the interconnectedness of women’s lives and inner worlds.

The exhibit features selections from McAlexander’s ongoing Soul Portrait Series. Drawing inspiration from classical portraiture, mythology and the natural world, she is known for her evocative, figurative oil paintings and live wedding paintings.

“McAlexander’s paintings feel intimate, contemplative and emotionally alive,” says Becky Arrington, co-owner of The Well of Roswell. “Her work carries a quiet sense of reverence that invites viewers to slow down and reflect. The combination of realism and symbolism creates an experience that is both grounded and dreamlike, with each painting suggesting a deeper story beneath the surface.”

*For more information, call 770-380-7906 or visit TheWellOfRoswell.com. The Well of Roswell is located at 900 Old Roswell Lakes Parkway, Suite 300, in Roswell.*

### Billy Cash at Phoenix & Dragon

Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore Gallery presents “The Art of Observation: Drawings and Paintings by Billy Cash” from July 3 through July 30, with an opening reception from 6 to 8 p.m. on July 3. Billy Cash is an Atlanta native and a professional artist of 20 years. He is a realist whose recent works explore the rhythms and patterns of growth and erosion using wax pencil, gouache and oil paint.

Cash has shown and won awards in Turkey and is in the permanent collection at the High Museum, as well as several private collections internationally. He was also represented by the Lyman-Eyer Gallery in Provincetown, Massachusetts, from 2005 to 2014. The Phoenix & Dragon Metaphysical Bookstore selected Cash’s work for its connection to the summertime season. A passionate student of nature, Cash’s studies are lush and seemingly tranquil on the surface, yet they leave the impression that something else is resting just out of sight.



Unused Turnip and Kale Seedlings

“Painting from life fosters an intimate connection with the subject— true observation is a powerful act, capable of transforming the ordinary into something extraordinary,” Cash says.

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



One in a Million

### Amy Draghiceanu at Wellness Emporium

The work of local artist Amy Draghiceanu is being featured at The Wellness Emporium’s second anniversary Open House event in Woodstock on June 20.

A self-taught painter working in large format acrylics, Draghiceanu found that painting was an emotional outlet for her that grew into a joyful way to express herself and share beauty with others. Each of her works is infused with color, movement and emotion, reflecting the energy she feels as she paints. Her piece titled “One in a Million,” which took shape over several years, will be featured along with several paintings for sale at The Wellness Emporium.

*The Wellness Emporium is located at 1501 Regency Way, Suite 104, in Woodstock.*

## Crossroads Yoga Founder, MacPherson, passes

Kim MacPherson, founder and owner of Crossroads Yoga in Milton, passed away at home on May 6.

MacPherson opened Crossroads Yoga in 2022, at 980 Birmingham Road #604, in the Birmingham Village shopping center. It was Milton's only yoga studio, and, according to friends, it was the realization of a dream for MacPherson.

MacPherson studied communications and commercial design at the University of Maryland. She was an RYT 200 yoga teacher, artist, reiki master, children's book author, and illustrator of the book, *Wish, Miracle, Me!* In years past, she owned an online marketing agency for 12 years, sold new homes and worked as a senior marketer for a large consumer publisher.

Under MacPherson's guidance, Crossroads Yoga studio grew from just 21 classes and nine teachers at its opening to almost 30 classes and 17 teachers by early 2023. In interviews, MacPherson noted that the studio focused on yoga for "all ages and stages," with vinyasa, chair yoga, yin, restorative and gentle yoga classes.

MacPherson leaves behind her husband, Paul, her son, Ian, and many friends and yogis who loved her.



Kim MacPherson

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**Kimchi May Help Excrete Nanoplastics**

An estimated 10 to 40 million metric tons of microplastics and nanoplastics are released into the environment every year. These particles have been found in nearly every major human organ, and they are linked to chronic health conditions, including reproductive issues, cancer and heart disease. Because avoiding all plastic particles may be impossible, scientists are exploring ways to remove them from the body.

Scientists at the World Institute of Kimchi discovered that a specific probiotic bacterium (*Leuconostoc mesenteroides*) found in fermented kimchi can bind to polystyrene nanoplastics in the gut and help flush them out. In a study published in *Bioresource Technology*, the research team fed nanoplastics, along with the bacterium, to mice that were subjected to the highly acidic and turbulent intestinal conditions of humans. About 57 percent of the bacterium absorbed nanoplastics. The mice given the probiotic excreted more than double the amount of nanoplastics in their feces compared to the control group. Researchers recommended further studies with the human gut.

**Lead Exposure and Cardiovascular Disease**

Lead exposure is a major environmental cause of cardiovascular disease, responsible for nearly 6 percent of global deaths. A 2026 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* links long-term lead exposure to an increased risk of dying from cardiovascular disease. Exposure is measured by how much lead accumulates in the body over time. Using decades of data from more than 42,000 U.S. adults, along with international studies, researchers found that even low levels of exposure increase the risk of heart disease and stroke, and the risk steadily rises as lead accumulates in the body.

Although exposure to lead has decreased worldwide, it remains a major, preventable contributor to global cardiovascular disease. The study's authors emphasize the need for surveillance, regulation and remediation to reduce exposure.

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# Summer in Every Bite

## Vibrant, Versatile Salads

by Maya Whitman



Whether we picnic in the park, meet friends for a hike or attend a community event, staying hydrated is crucial while enjoying the outdoors. Besides refilling water bottles, creating a vibrant, hydrating salad—like sweet melon, fiery radishes and arugula with a basil-lime vinaigrette—is a delightful way to enjoy the summer. Seasonal ingredients such as refreshing cucumbers, heirloom tomatoes, leafy greens and blushing fruits have a high-water content, along with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that boost energy and overall well-being.

Beyond the usual lettuce bowl, summer salads can combine locally sourced produce, whole grains, healthy fats and fresh herbs to satisfy any palate. Versatile

and delicious, they travel well and elevate backyard dining. Adding the final pop, a flavorful dressing pulls it all together.

### Great Foundations

Sourcing ingredients from our own backyards, local farmers or a community-supported garden offers a world of choices. “Most produce at farmers markets has been picked or harvested at the peak of ripeness within the last 24 to 48 hours. The initial flavor and juiciness are robust and different from produce that is picked and shipped,” says Jane Maxwell, former executive director of the Illinois Farmers Market Association, in Naperville, Illinois. She emphasizes that farmers provide diversity rarely seen on supermarket shelves. “Instead of a few types of

tomatoes, you may find a vendor with six to 10 different varieties of tomatoes, each with a unique flavor and purpose. The flavor of a yellow citrine tomato is very different from a Cherokee purple, and with the variety of flavors, you also get a wide range of micronutrients.”

Maxwell recommends shopping according to personal needs and relying on the senses. “Are you using it today, or do you want it to last the week? Fresh produce will have a sweet aroma. Look for bright colors and items without bruising or shriveling,” she advises. “Don’t be put off by unusually shaped produce. It still has all the amazing qualities you are looking for.”

Sometimes the best salad fixings can be found right in our own neighborhood. Hidden gems include honor-system produce setups at the end of driveways and passionate backyard gardeners that share their surplus.

### Bountiful Pairings

Nutritious combos can be artful or simple with an element of spontaneity, depending on what is available. Uncommon additions like sweet, ruby-fleshed plums; crisp, thinly sliced, raw fennel; spicy-sweet, shredded, raw turnips; or pitted black cherries can make mellow produce like Boston lettuce sing.

Cynthia Sass, a registered dietitian and plant-based nutritionist in Los Angeles, offers high-performance nutritional advice to celebrities and professional sports figures. In her practice, satisfying the taste buds is just as important as

optimizing nourishment. Her favorite side salads are sliced cucumbers and cherry tomatoes marinated in lemon vinaigrette and basil, as well as shredded carrot salad with pineapple, fresh ginger and raisins. For a hearty dinner salad, Sass combines greens, lean or plant-based protein and a complex carb like cooked and chilled quinoa, sweet potato or wild rice. She also likes combining warm and cold elements, beginning with a base of crisp lettuce and adding tempeh, veggie kabobs or skewered baby potatoes fresh from the grill.

“Healthy salads are the most delicious and rewarding. Food is medicine,” says Devon Quinn, the executive chef and co-owner of Eden, a contemporary restaurant in Chicago. He likes to incorporate “legumes of any kind and in any form” in his salads, valuing their added high protein and fiber content. For an innovative texture, he suggests, “cooking beans or lentils, patting them dry and then pan-frying them in olive oil until crispy. When bubbles mostly subside, remove them from the oil and wick away excess fat by laying them out on a paper towel, then season them with kosher salt while hot.”

### Delectable Dressings

Healthy sources of fat like avocado and olive oil in zesty dressings can enhance the absorption of carotenoids and other nutrients found in plants, and Sass notes that vinegar can support blood sugar regulation. For creamy dressings, she opts for a base of tahini, a paste made from ground sesame seeds, with fresh herbs and lemon.

Quinn brings out nuances in fruit salads with bright citrus dressings and the addition of piquant herbs like lovage and anise hyssop. For green salads, he adds diced shallots to a vinaigrette made the day before to allow for “pickling” overnight. For a gourmet cheese-like effect without the use of cheese, Quinn pulses in “toasted black walnuts to vinaigrettes with the use of high-quality olive oil.”

Maya Whitman is a frequent writer for Natural Awakenings.



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# Wellness Without Walls

## Outdoor Connections for Body and Spirit

by Marlaina Donato



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Our daily lives can feel like a series of predictable routines often confined to the indoors, but a growing outdoor wellness movement is opening up new possibilities by weaving nature into holistic health practices and social gatherings. Whether paddleboarding along a tropical waterway, working out in the park or volunteering at a horse sanctuary, stepping outside brings a wealth of benefits.

The American Psychological Association suggests that spending at least two hours a week in nature can nourish our physical and mental well-being, helping to reduce the risk of depression, cognitive decline and high blood pressure. Plus, engaging in an outdoor activity imparts a natural boost of vitamin D and strengthens our immune system. Research gathered by Colorado State University Sustainability Leadership Fellow Kaiya Tamlyn indicates that spending time outside also encourages greater generosity and a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

With so many activities available in both city and rural settings, it is easy to discover something new while making social connections along the way. Finding balance in a busy world is essential, and combining outdoor time, mindfulness and fun can be incredibly beneficial. There are many options to explore, from meditative mountain retreats to beachside drumming circles under the stars

or forest bathing in lush green spaces. In a world where 62 percent of adults admit to being constantly online, swapping screens for something more real can recharge our spirits.

### Mindful Resets

When Jennifer Stas-Eliades took up yoga, she bloomed, and from that place of transformation, she felt called to help others do the same. In 2014, she founded Wildflower Yoga Collective, in Flemington, New Jersey. “Yoga is not about being flexible, experienced or a certain age,” she asserts. “It isn’t about doing a headstand or touching your toes. It’s about showing up for yourself, exactly as you are.”

In partnership with local businesses, Stas-Eliades pairs yoga classes with fun, social activities in interesting outdoors settings. Yoga at the Vineyard, for example, is held during sunset and includes a wine tasting. Yoga and Horseback Riding begins with a guided ride through breathtaking scenery, followed by stretches and yoga positions that help open the hips. Lavender Yoga takes place in the midst of a blooming field where students are encouraged to breathe in the calming lavender aroma. Afterward, they pick their own bouquet to take home.

“It’s the greatest kind of office—being outside, surrounded by it all. I always arrive early, giving myself time to take it in, decompress, root into the ground, pet the horses or walk through the lavender,” says Stas-Eliades. “People often come to yoga class carrying the weight of their day—work, school pickups, the constant motion. But then they step onto the grass, onto their mat; the sun hits their skin; the breeze moves around them; and something softens. You’re really rooting into the ground in a way that isn’t just metaphorical like it can be in the studio. You’re smelling the flowers and hearing everything around you.”

### Exploring Waterways

Nicole Killian, owner of SUP Englewood at the Don Pedro Island State Park, in Cape Haze, Florida, provides groups the opportunity to enjoy nature on kayaks or stand-up paddleboards. “Once on the water, we guide participants through mangrove tunnels, coastal waterways or open areas, depending on conditions,” says the 20-year paddling pro. “Spotting wildlife is always a possibility,

especially dolphins, manatees and birds. We offer a real immersive experience based on what the environment gives us that day.”

According to Killian, people that are new to the sport are often surprised at how manageable and enjoyable stand-up paddleboarding and kayaking are. “We design our experiences to be beginner-friendly, so people leave with confidence,” she explains. “Families connect, kids get curious and there are also quiet moments on the water that allow people to slow down and really take in their surroundings. Those moments tend to have the biggest impact.”

Ultimately, the SUP Englewood team of certified instructors and Florida Master Naturalists aims to inspire an understanding and compassion for the marine ecosystem. “I find that in order for someone to want to conserve the waterways, they have to fall in love with them,” says Killian. “We create experiences that motivate people to want to protect the delicate balance of our marine habitats for generations to come.”

### Dynamic Hiking

Former professional alpine skier Tina Vindum discovered her true passion when she hit a plateau with indoor training. Feeling bored with her usual routine, she decided to take her workouts outdoors and explore the Sierra Nevada terrain. “The natural environment challenged my body in new ways and re-engaged my mind,” she recalls. “I quickly saw improvements in performance, along with unexpected benefits like greater focus, calm and a renewed sense of joy.”

Inspired by her experience, Vindum founded The Outdoor Fitness Institute, a science-based approach to exercise that leverages the natural environment. She uses elements like hills, trails, grass, trees, rocks, benches and open space to create more dynamic, functional movement. “Nature becomes your gym, and your body responds in ways machines simply can’t replicate,” she explains. “For most people, it can be as simple as walking or hiking on uneven ground, adding hill intervals or incorporating strength exercises like squats, lunges or push-ups in a park.”

Vindum believes that moving in open spaces helps people shift from feeling separate from nature to feeling part of it. “Nature brings me a sense of calm, clarity and perspective,” she says. “It reconnects me to something deeper—a feeling of freedom, joy and aliveness that goes beyond fitness. It’s also how I connect with others.”

A 2024 study published by *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience* backs up Vindum’s assertions, finding a significant uptick in prefrontal cortical activation with increasing terrain unevenness during walking. The positive effects of sunlight on mood and mental health have also been researched and confirmed by numerous studies.

### Wild Wanderings

Since 1976, Lanny Kaufer has been a firsthand witness to the rejuvenating power of outdoor hikes and finding hidden gems in nature. His Herb Walks in Southern California invite participants to get active while learning about the healing world of edible and medicinal plants. A typical excursion can last two to three hours of easy walking that is accessible for most people.

“After acknowledging the local Indigenous people of whatever location we’re in and thanking the plants, we explore the trailside vegetation as we walk, stopping from time to time to point out what’s catching my attention, sharing stories about the plants and animals, responding to participants’ curiosity, discussing sustainable foraging and learning to identify helpful plants,” he explains.

The author of *Medicinal Herbs of California: A Field Guide to*

*Common Healing Plants* says that his journey began with a spiritual awakening in the mountains of the Los Padres National Forest outside his home in Ojai. “I felt the plants speak to me,” Kaufer remembers, and that is when he felt called to help protect not only plants but also the rest of nature for future generations.

Over time, he realized that people need to be inspired to protect nature, mostly by understanding why it matters. At nearly 80 years old, his passion is still as

strong as it was in the 1970s. “Whether it’s a plant that can wash your hair, a seed that plants itself or a leaf that creates its own sunscreen, I am helping people find that value,” he says.

### Seasonal Stewardship

Volunteering outdoors is a rewarding way to broaden our horizons. Whether we are helping with trail maintenance at a nature sanctuary or organizing campground activities, our efforts can make a positive impact. For five years, Stacy Turner has volunteered at the Winthrop National Fish Hatchery, in Washington state, greeting visitors, conducting hatchery tours and supporting events and field trips. Her enthusiasm for the hatchery’s mission is joyful and infectious, inspiring others to join the cause.

“I wanted people to not just look at fish but also learn about the hatchery and all that they do to bring back the success of fish that are native to our area,” she explains, adding that visitors of all ages have expressed interest in pursuing a similar path of stewardship. “In a world that is plugged into the internet, it is always hard to remember that you can get way more out of life by stepping outside and exploring what is in your own backyard, and you are never too old to enjoy life.” 🌿

Marlaina Donato is an author, painter and composer. Connect at [WildflowersAndWoodSmoke.com](https://www.WildflowersAndWoodSmoke.com).

  
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# Rhythm and Renewal

## The Transformative Power of Group Drumming

by Hannah Tytus



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**A**cross cultures and throughout history, rhythm has been used to support healing, celebration and connection. From traditional ceremonies to modern wellness gatherings, drumming communities create a space where people can share rhythm together, often without the need for extensive musical training or performance. Participants simply follow the beat, listen and contribute their own sound, creating a collective experience that can feel both grounding and energizing.

### Spiritual Renewal

“Drumming is not just something I play—it is a call to the strength of my ancestors,” says Francis Agyakwa, an educator and social worker reflecting on his Ghanaian heritage.

“When we play the drum, we are giving back our tears, our toils and our stress to Mother Earth.”

For him, the West African djembe—played with bare hands—offers a way to process emotion and transform tension. He leads group drumming sessions to help build resilience through self-expression, and in 2022, he presented a TEDx talk on how this traditional practice can help heal trauma.

When mentoring youth, Agyakwa has seen firsthand the benefits of drumming as a discipline and an intervention. “Their minds stop wandering,” he explains. “They are finally present. For that moment, all they have to do is sit, focus and experience the drum.”

### Unity and Empowerment

Kristen Arant is a performing artist, songwriter and educator in the Washington, D.C., area. Affectionately known as “The Drum-lady”, she leads the Bele Bele Rhythm Collective, a diverse, intergenerational group of women and non-binary folks that celebrate unity and spread the joy and power of West African drumming.

“Drumming together in a group creates a bridge between people that is stronger than the pull of their differences,” says Arant. “People become entrained. Entrainment is the process where two interacting, oscillating systems synchronize to the same rhythm. Our heartbeats and brainwaves become synchronized when we drum together.”

Arant founded and ran the Young Women’s Drumming Empowerment Project from 2005 to 2015 to help teenage girls use drumming as a tool for building self-esteem, personal growth and healing. As the young women learned to play the djembe, they were able to release buried emotion, amplify their voices and express their most authentic selves through rhythm.

“When you sit down in a drumming circle, you’re harnessing the power of ancient technology, and the healing process begins as soon as you put your hands on a drum and begin to play,” Arant explains, adding that playing with bare hands allows the player to channel and express feelings of love, freedom and empowerment.

### Addiction Recovery and Brain Health

Daniel Dickerson, an associate research psychiatrist at the University of California, Los Angeles, Integrated Substance Use and Addiction Programs, studies the effectiveness of Native American drumming as a treatment for substance use disorders. “Drumming has been a core aspect of the identity of Native Americans,” he says. “It is a very sacred, spiritual practice that is culturally and community-rooted. With cultural-based interventions, we believe there is an opportunity to heal from historical trauma and to restore the balance.”

A 2021 clinical trial of Drum-Assisted Recovery Therapy for Native Americans, developed by Dickerson, showed that drumming reduced drug and alcohol use, decreased cognitive impairment and lowered physical ailment complaints among American Indian/Alaska Native participants. “Substance use is a disease of isolation,” he explains. “With drumming, you get plucked out of your own self and your isolated state, and you are thrown into a supportive Native American community.”

Dickerson also points out that earlier research has shown that “drumming helps to enhance healthy brainwave activity, very similar to what you would see in meditation.” With this increased connectivity between different brain regions, “you have a better ability to handle your feelings and make better decisions.” Nevertheless, healing and recovery require long-term commitments. “You need consistency to sustain any healthy practice,” he observes.

### Skills and Practice

“There is so much more to drumming than just sitting there and banging on the head of the djembe. There is a structure to it, such as making different shapes with your hands and bouncing them off a surface in different ways,” says Agyakwa, adding that once students learn the basic techniques, they can flow into creative expressions with more ease.

“Each person brings a unique sound to the ensemble,” he remarks. “When we sit in a circle, there’s no hierarchy—only connection. You are going to get out of it as much as you give. Always remember to honor the people that brought this incredible ritual to you. The energy, the joy, the connection—we generate that together.” 🌟

*Hannah Tytus is an integrative health coach, former writer at the National Institutes of Health and host of the Root Shock podcast, exploring the cultural dimensions of health.*

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# Elohee Retreat Center Celebrates 15 Years

by Noah Chen



Photo: Z1Photo

Tucked into the Blue Ridge Mountains, 90 miles from Atlanta, Elohee Retreat Center sits on 220 acres near the top of Bald Mountain. With a 100-foot waterfall, hiking trails and panoramic views, the center has welcomed visitors for retreats focused on rest, renewal and spiritual awakening. This May marked Elohee's 15th year of offering retreats and wellness programs amidst the beauty of the North Georgia mountains.

Elohee features a village of seven cottages near the top of Bald Mountain, as well as a living and meeting house at the bottom of the mountain. The facilities also include shared dining spaces, yoga and meditation rooms and a reflection pond. Retreats hosted at Elohee run the gamut from yoga and breathwork studies, women's and men's groups and spiritual empowerment retreats.

The inspiration to launch a retreat center came after Eve Cook, Executive Director and co-founder, was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. "It was supposed to

be an easy cancer to treat, but mine ended up being this refractory cancer, which kept coming back after the treatment," says Cook. When the cancer came back the first time, she not only looked for alternative treatment methods, but felt a pressure to pursue a dream of hers.

Cook and her family—her parents, Andy and Carolyn Bralley, and her husband Michael—had "always talked about having a retreat center down the road, like a 20-year plan or something. But it was accelerated once my life became a question of how much longer I have left to live. I decided: Let's just go for it."

Cook and her husband began exploring properties on the market to get a sense of what might be feasible. When they found the tract of land Elohee now sits on, she felt the energy and presence of the land instantly. That was what she was seeking.

The family purchased the land in 2010, and in 2011, they began hosting small retreats

out of the "Thanksgiving House"—a home nestled in a rich cove forest at the base of the mountain that can house up to 13 guests and features fireplaces, meditation/yoga room and an outdoor patio.

The family opened Elohee initially as a for-profit business, but it wasn't until five years later, in 2016, when it was incorporated as a nonprofit organization, that the business began to gain real traction. By that time, Cook had won her battle with cancer, too.

Groups of ten to 12 came for weekend retreats initially, and it was mostly word of mouth that expanded awareness and interest in the programs at the center. In response, Cook and her team built a new retreat space at the top of the mountain, one that can host groups with up to 50 participants. And the center's offerings grew to include a broader range of programs.

"At its heart, Elohee was created to offer something that felt increasingly rare—a place where people could step out of the noise of everyday life and reconnect with themselves, with nature and with a deeper sense of meaning," says Cook. She's been very grateful over the years, she says, as she provided visitors with a space to heal and recharge and has watched the center expand to allow a maximum occupancy that has more than quadrupled since its opening.

## Nature, Spirituality and Community

Three founding principles sit at the heart of Elohee and help guide the organization in its mission. The first is that nature is a teacher; the second is that Elohee remains spiritual but nonsectarian; and the third is that community is an important part of the experience.

Jason Lyle, a wilderness guide and retreat leader who focuses on men's mental health, also felt a deep connection to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"The first time I stepped onto the land, I knew it was different. It felt like a place where men could actually slow down enough to tell the truth," Lyle says. He had



Photo: Bonnie Heath

Michael and Eve Cook

been looking for a place that "could hold both the rugged, embodied work I do and the deeper spiritual side of it." Elohee ticked all his boxes.

"The combination of nature, quiet and intentional structure creates an environment where real work can happen without distraction," he says. Through his work at Elohee, Lyle has seen "men reconnect with their families, commit to sobriety and begin taking responsibility for their inner world in a way they never had before."

Lyle says the combination of the land and the intention behind the center is why it works so well. "There's a respect for the process—no rush, no pressure to be anything other than where you are. That

creates trust. And when people feel safe enough to be honest, that's when the real work begins."

Retreats hosted at Elohee are diverse and serve many different audiences. While Lyle's work focuses on giving men a space to connect, Cook says the majority of their retreat goers are women. Elohee sees "a lot of young moms who are totally exhausted," she says. "They just need a break so they can rest and can go back to their family life stronger and more rested."

## Weathering Disruption

The past decade has not been without disruption. Like virtually every retreat and hospitality operation, Elohee was forced to shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cook describes that period as a significant turning point. "It required a complete rethinking of operations, safety and scheduling," she says. "At the same time, it reaffirmed how essential spaces for rest and reflection are, especially during times of uncertainty." She says the center emerged from the pandemic with a clearer sense of its identity and a broader recognition of what it offers.

COVID, which came with extreme social isolation for many, was especially impactful for Elohee, which has always put a focus on community-building. One of the ways Elohee encourages socializing is through

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communal meals and dining spaces. On multiple occasions, Cook has seen visitors form lifelong friendships at Elohee.

“There’s been so many stories of someone who’s met someone on a retreat,” says Cook. “They came solo, and then they’re coming back now with their new friend that they met. You know, it’s kind of very sweet.”

“My favorite thing about this place is getting to allow people to open up and share their struggles, because there’s no escaping this human life without some kind of traumas,” says Cook. “I’ve been fortunate to be able to hear and hold space for a lot of people during their healing, too. It just means the world to me.”

### Evolving Programming

One measure of the center’s evolution is its programming. In recent years, Elohee noticed a shift in what guests were asking for. “We noticed an increasing number of people who just want to get away with no or minimal programming,” Cook explains. “A chance to have a break from everyday commitments and just ‘be’ in a supportive environment without having to adhere to a schedule. This feedback birthed Elohee’s signature Rest & Relaxation Weekends.”

The broader retreat and wellness industry has changed considerably over the same period, as well, and Elohee has had to distinguish itself within a more crowded field. “One of the biggest changes has been the increased demand for authentic, meaningful experiences rather than transactional or surface-level offerings. Elohee has responded by staying rooted in depth—focusing on quality of experience and intentional programming and creating space for genuine transformation rather than quick fixes.”

Adriana Guaderrama, a yoga teacher who first came to Elohee as a guest at the Thanksgiving House, agrees that Elohee holds a unique sense of authenticity and presence. “I remember arriving and immediately sensing that this was more than just a retreat center—it felt intentional, grounded and deeply connected to nature. That first experience stayed with me, and

over time it naturally evolved into hosting my own retreats there,” she says.

Lyle concurs. “A lot of places feel like they’re trying to impress you,” he says. “Elohee doesn’t. It invites you. There’s a simplicity to it that actually allows people to drop their guard. It’s not about performance or perfection—it’s about presence.”

Guaderrama points out that Elohee “has remained rooted in its essence—connection to nature, simplicity and presence. At the same time, I’ve seen it evolve in beautiful ways, like the addition of the pavilion, which allows you to connect with nature even more deeply.” Hosting her first retreat at Elohee was a turning point in her own work as a facilitator. “Elohee created an environment where I felt supported as a facilitator; it allowed me to step more fully into that role,” she says. “It’s a space that not only holds participants, but also nurtures the growth of the teachers who guide them.”


### Change that Lasts

Now that Elohee is halfway through its second decade, Cook is proud and grateful for the retreat center’s growth. In the coming years, her focus won’t be so much on the size or scale of the facility, but on creating a lasting institution.

“I’m not going to be alive forever,” says Cook. “We’re not going to be alive forever. So, how can we keep it going, you know?” Her answer is to focus on building a strong administrative team and creating lasting partnerships with retreat organizers who understand and align with Elohee’s mission. And as the energy and authentic presence of the mountain are still palpable to those who visit Elohee, the center continues to evolve. “We’re very happy with how we’ve grown—and we’re still growing,” Cook says. 🙌



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

Yoga 

# Rest is Always Available

## Restorative Yoga in Metro Atlanta

by Patricia Schmidt



This article is our most popular yoga article of all time. It was originally published in our August 2024 issue. – Publisher

This month’s article on restorative yoga continues *Natural Awakening’s* review of popular yoga styles in the Atlanta metro area. Restorative yoga classes are available at almost every major studio in Atlanta. They’re often scheduled late in the day, reflecting the slower pace of the class and the intention for a restful experience. In fact, restorative yoga is a unique yoga style with a unique purpose: it invites deep rest and nourishment as an integral part of the postural experience. It fosters a felt sense of rest and ease as a ground from which to live and to which we may always return. In other words, it helps us become aware that rest and ease are always available.

### RESTORATIVE YOGA ESSENTIALS

#### A slow pace and limited postures

A slow pace and limited postures facilitate a sense of ease. Restorative yoga usually refers to a very slow-paced postural practice. Over the course of an hour’s class, for example, students will take five to eight yoga postures and hold them for longer periods of time. Three to five minutes is the typical amount of time spent in a posture, while a longer period of time might also be considered for certain fundamental opening or closing postures, such as corpse pose, or *savasana*, in Sanskrit.

The fewer postures and longer holds differentiate restorative yoga from other more active yoga practices, and the focus or intention of the class is ease. Restorative yoga becomes an invitation to the body and mind to take deep rest and nourishment, to pause and stop. The style encourages students to step away from the intensity of other yoga and workout practices and, more importantly, step away from the hustle of daily life. Some teachers even include gentle movement, such as a very slow movement of the spine in multiple directions, as a kind of “rinsing” of the longer-held postures. Still, the longer holds, facilitated by lots of props, and the limited movement during and between poses will predominate the class.

#### An environment conducive to rest

In contrast to high-intensity practices such as gym workouts that often take place in frenetic, noisy environments and encourage students to constantly move energy, restorative yoga uses a limited number of longer-held postures to limit the sensations experienced by the body. Teachers of restorative yoga also often make further environmental adjustments to reduce physical stimulation, such as darkening the room and limiting external noise. Students can usually expect to find dimmed lights, a light scent such as lavender oil, low-volume music with a small dynamic range and a quiet studio environment.

#### Yoga props that encourage a sense of ease, support and “not doing”

Restorative yoga classes are known for including a variety of props. Blankets are used to support the head, arms, legs and more. Students are encouraged to prop their bodies away from a cold floor or to pad against the hardness of the floor. Blankets can be used on top of the body to feel covered and protected and, if desired, weighted. Yoga pillows, or “bolsters,” are sometimes used to prop the body, too. They can be used to limit the sensation of stretching, achieve more ease within a pose, and increase the feeling of being supported. Eye pillows are often used not just to darken one’s vision but also as a gentle weight on the surface of the palms or forehead.

Props play an important role in restorative yoga by encouraging the student to ask themselves, “How little can I do? How much can I surrender?” The practitioner aims to let the pose do the work and accept the process of surrender. This is in stark contrast to yin yoga practices of “finding an edge” and sitting with sensation. Yin yoga’s emphasis on target areas and connective tissue experiences is absent from restorative yoga practices, for example. The restorative yoga postures are also more welcome than those practiced in a strict yoga nidra class, where postural yoga isn’t part of the experience. Of course, yoga nidra and restorative yoga have intention-setting and body scan techniques in common, but the focus on letting go and feeling held and supported during the postural part of the practice is unique to restorative yoga.

## WHY REST?

### To live with greater ease

Perhaps even more significant than understanding how to rest with restorative yoga is why rest is so significant. Dominique Harmon, LCSW, E-RYT 200, R-HYI, is an Atlanta-based mental healthcare practitioner and experienced yoga instructor who uses restorative practices to serve her students, especially women of color. Harmon is the founder of *A Life Lived on Purpose*, a wellness company that integrates psychotherapy and health coaching along with yoga and meditation practices. She stresses that restorative yoga practices welcome an alternate way of being in the world, calling it a lifestyle choice—one that welcomes a consistent state of greater ease.

“We don’t have to be dis-regulated in order to engage in restorative yoga,” Harmon explains. “Think about keeping your tank filled, keeping your cup full. We have these practices that we just know—that help us to be at our best. We do them because we know that they help us to be at our best.”

### To counter stress

Based in Peachtree City, yoga teacher Jill Elkin, E-RYT 200, RYT 500, YACEP, is certified in a restorative practice called iRest as well as other restorative yoga techniques. She regularly leads Restore and Renew teacher trainings with Judith Lasater, and assists iRest retreats and trainings too. She stresses that restorative yoga offers a way to forge neural pathways that lead us to our true self, which is untouched by our daily experiences and to which we can always return. Restorative practices offer us an opportunity on the mat to practice being witness to ourselves. Elkin explains that when life presents challenges, “we get stuck in that nervous system spiral. Instead, [with restorative practices,] we have a lot of time feeling into what’s true for ourselves—our own sense of inner resource. That it’s always there, even in the background, when it doesn’t feel evident. [With restorative yoga,] we feel what we’re feeling right at that moment. And we ask [ourselves]: ‘Is there a place within myself where I feel whole and complete?’”

### To heal

Harmon believes that these practices are especially valuable for helping African



## - A Focused Advertising Section -

## CALENDAR

### WEDNESDAY, JULY 8

**Themsdays: Queer Yoga in the Park** – 6:30-7:30pm. Outdoor all-levels yoga experience for queer folk and allies to move, breathe and connect in community. Free. 740 Cherokee Ave SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Queer-Yoga-Atl-070826](http://bit.ly/Queer-Yoga-Atl-070826).

### SATURDAY, JULY 11

**Yoga for Readers** – 10-11am. Gentle all-levels, beginner-friendly practice focused on creating space for bodies compressed by reading. Free; use promo code YOGA FOR READERS. Kiss and Tale Romance Bookshop, 340 W Ponce de Leon Ave, Ste 202, Decatur. [bit.ly/Yoga-Readers-Event-071126](http://bit.ly/Yoga-Readers-Event-071126).

**Free Downtown Yoga at Founder’s Green** – 10-11am. Join Downtown Atlanta Inc for free, all-levels outdoor Vinyasa Flow. All ages and skill levels welcome. Bring mat and water. Founder’s Green, 110 Broad St SW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Founders-Green-Yoga-071126](http://bit.ly/Founders-Green-Yoga-071126).

### WEDNESDAY, JULY 15

**Gentle Yoga with Joan** – 11am-12pm. Gentle yoga class supporting balance, mobility and peace of mind for adults in a welcoming setting. Bring water and yoga mat. Free. Autrey Mill Nature Preserve, 9770 Autrey Mill Rd, Johns Creek. [bit.ly/Gentle-Yoga-Joan-071526](http://bit.ly/Gentle-Yoga-Joan-071526).

### THURSDAY, JULY 16

**Yoga at the Darwin Hotel** – 6:45-7:45pm. Free community yoga flow Thursday evenings at the Darwin Hotel. RSVP as space is limited. Free. The Darwin Hotel, 585 Parkway Dr NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Darwin-Hotel-Yoga-071626](http://bit.ly/Darwin-Hotel-Yoga-071626).

### FRIDAY, JULY 17

**THE ALCHEMY OF MAN: A 9-Part Monthly Yoga Series For Men** – 7-8:30pm. Monthly yoga series for men with intentional movement, breathwork and guided stillness to support healing and personal growth. \$25.55. LatJohns Pilates, 583 North Central Ave, Ste B, Hapeville. [bit.ly/Alchemy-Of-Man-Yoga-071726](http://bit.ly/Alchemy-Of-Man-Yoga-071726).

### SUNDAY, JULY 19

**Sol-Rise Sundays: FREE yoga in the park** – 11am-12pm. Beginner-friendly yin yoga flow with stretching, relaxation and high-

vibrational R&B. Bring mat, blanket, pillow and water. Free. Yellow River Park, 3232 Juhan Rd SW, Stone Mountain. [bit.ly/Sol-Rise-Yoga-071926](http://bit.ly/Sol-Rise-Yoga-071926).

**Yoga & Sound Bath Experience** – 4-5pm. Beginner-friendly restorative yoga flow with live singing bowls and guided meditation to support grounding, relaxation and renewal. \$15. 1800 Jonesboro Rd SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-Sound-Bath-Experience-071926](http://bit.ly/Yoga-Sound-Bath-Experience-071926).

### TUESDAY, JULY 21

**Atlanta Laughter Yoga Club** – 5:30-6:15pm. Monthly laughter yoga class with laughter exercises, deep breathing and playful activities led by Celeste Greene. Free. Trolley Barn, 963 Edgewood Ave NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Atlanta-Laughter-Yoga-072126](http://bit.ly/Atlanta-Laughter-Yoga-072126).

### SATURDAY, JULY 25

**Yoga in The Park - Free Yoga at Grant Park** – 10-11am. Join Neutral Moon Studio for a free, all-levels outdoor yoga flow. Registration required. Meet near Sydney St SE and Cherokee Ave SE, Grant Park, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-Grant-Park-072526](http://bit.ly/Yoga-Grant-Park-072526).

### SUNDAY, JULY 26

**Sunday Morning Yoga @ The Interlock** – 10-11am. Free all-levels community yoga class to reset and start the week grounded and refreshed. Bring mat, water and towel. The Interlock, 1115 Howell Mill Rd NW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/Yoga-At-The-Interlock-072626](http://bit.ly/Yoga-At-The-Interlock-072626).

### TUESDAY, JULY 28

**Yoga in the Park with Dancing Dogs Yoga** – 6-7pm. Outdoor yoga flow for all experience levels, powered by lululemon, Dancing Dogs Yoga and Piedmont Park Conservancy. Free. The Promenade, Greensward Path, Atlanta. Paid parking. [bit.ly/Lululemon-Yoga-Event-072826](http://bit.ly/Lululemon-Yoga-Event-072826).

### ONGOING - SUNDAYS

**The Silent Center: Breath, Ribs & Spine** – 1:30-3pm. There’s a part of you that shapes how you move, breathe and carry yourself. Discover it in this is a new, six-part Feldenkrais series with Ravi Prabhakar. \$40 drop in. Vista Yoga, 2836 Lavista Rd. [bit.ly/Vista-Yoga](http://bit.ly/Vista-Yoga)

### GIVING TREE YOGA CENTER

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770-626-1559

### PRENATAL YOGA, SATURDAYS, LAFLOY FLOW YOGA

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### VISTA YOGA

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[vistayoga.com](http://vistayoga.com)

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Americans heal from the structural and systemic racism and trauma they experience. She offers virtual and in-person retreats for women of color, emphasizing restorative yoga practices as one of many tools Black women can use to increase their well-being and shift their perspective and life approach. Restorative yoga, she explains, makes an “explicit invitation” to comfort, which translates to practices off the mat. “I really like the analogy of being *held* with restorative yoga because, oftentimes, we approach life being very independent. [We think,] ‘I’ve gotta do this by myself, and I can’t take the easy way out. I’ve gotta do it the hard way.’”

“I don’t think that’s true,” she continues. “I think that we can always look for ease—how to invite and bring more ease into everything we do in life. Restorative yoga really asks us to do that—how can you be in this posture with as much ease as possible? And give yourself permission to be held by the bolster, the blocks. If you’re cold, put on socks. Use a blanket. Do you need a second blanket? You don’t have to tough it out! It’s asking us to bring ease

and comfort to this opportunity of being in this posture. I really like that, and it translates so well into life.”

Elkin also uses restorative yoga to serve those living with complex PTSD and chronic pain as well as veterans and speaks to the shift of mindset that these practices facilitate. Restorative yoga “changes your perspective,” she says. “It makes a small shift. It’s not a cure ... but restorative yoga can really help to make a shift. And we practice that mindset shift, and when times do get difficult, it’s there. You know where it is; you’re able to have a neural pathway to the experience of being OK, pulling through all the threads, until you find it and say to yourself, ‘Here it is.’” 🌱



Patricia Schmidt, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, YACEP, is a certified yoga therapist specializing in pelvic health, accessible yoga and yoga for cancer support. She is a

Franklin Method trainer, Roll Model method teacher and somatic movement specialist. To learn more, visit [PLSYoga.com](http://PLSYoga.com).



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# Journeys That Change Us

A Conversation With Anthony Profeta

by Sandra Yeyati

Renowned meditation teacher and sound-therapy expert Anthony Profeta leads transformative retreats in spiritual destinations worldwide such as India, Greece, Italy, Bali, Thailand and Nepal. Over the past 26 years, he has dedicated his life to studying Eastern and Western contemplative traditions under the mentorship of esteemed teachers, including Sharon Salzberg, Jack Kornfield, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the Dalai Lama.

Profeta developed an interest in sound healing during his time in an Indian monastery where Tibetan monks used Himalayan singing bowls in meditation. He conducts transcendent sound baths in sold-out venues across the U.S. and provides singing bowl therapy at the Cleveland Clinic and New Horizons of the Treasure Coast & Okeechobee, a mental health and substance abuse recovery agency. In 2025, Profeta earned the award for Best Sound Therapist in the U.S. from Evergreen Awards.

Profeta's upcoming trips include The Soul of Egypt Tour from September 13 to 24, offering private access to all three chambers of the Great Pyramid; a Sedona retreat from October 29 to November 2, featuring therapeutic hikes among the area's world-famous red rocks; and a return to Egypt in 2027 for The Veil of Ra Eclipse from July 28 to August 4, allowing participants to experience six minutes of midday darkness among the temples of ancient Thebes.



Courtesy of Anthony Profeta

## Why are your tours unique?

They are all spiritually oriented, though spirituality isn't required to participate. We visit sacred locations and always include meditation sessions, both in the morning and at the sacred sites. In Italy, my tours feature sound baths. While a local guide often accompanies us, I also provide insights into the spiritual philosophies of the places we explore.

This type of travel is especially powerful when it helps people form a connection to something. We're not just visiting beautiful locations; we're immersing ourselves in places imbued with wonderful energy.

In Rishikesh, we visit the Beatles' ashram, now a museum, which delights fans standing where John Lennon and George Harrison once did. I discuss Transcendental

Meditation, which the band members practiced, and we engage in a meditation session there. We might also talk about how their meditation and spirituality influenced their music.

In Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree, there's always at least one person moved to tears when they sit under the tree. It changes them. In Egypt, some feel like they've had a past life there, and now they're reconnected with it. These trips often become pilgrimages of connection and awakening.

Because it's group travel, it becomes a shared experience that creates lasting bonds. Whether we're watching a sunset in Sedona, walking through sacred sites, sharing meals or riding a bus, we share stories, get to know each other and laugh together. Those moments become emotional anchors that connect people long after the trip ends. Some of the most meaningful journeys are the ones we share.

## What makes a place sacred?

That's a tough question to answer because what people consider sacred is subjective. For some, the awe-inspiring peaks of Mount Shasta are as sacred as a 4,000-year-old temple. The beauty of a place can make it spiritual.

Because Assisi is a UNESCO World Heritage site, it cannot be modernized, so you are transported back to medieval Italy. I lead discussions about the life of St. Francis, including his spiritual ideas and practices. People have told me they can feel a deep connection to St. Francis there, sensing his



Courtesy of Anthony Profeta

spirit in the olive groves and streets. It's as if they're taking his same footsteps, and it becomes a very spiritual experience.

On the other hand, Varanasi, India, is one of the seven sacred cities to Hindus, where many go to die. In the Hindu tradition, it's a place where cremations occur along the Ganges River. When I take Westerners to witness this, they can't believe it's happening out in the open like that. So, what makes a place sacred is subjective.

## What kinds of transformations have you witnessed?

Very often, when I guide a meditation in a pyramid or a beautiful location, people start to cry. Some feel connected to a past life; others share that they have received a crucial message they needed to hear. Couples have walked away transformed by the shared experience and the meditations, promising to continue meditating together at home to support each other's journeys.

In Sedona, I've seen people pushed beyond their comfort zones. Whether we're walking or hiking, when they reach the top of the mountain and they're looking out over the valley, they begin to cry and say, "I can't believe I did this." This achievement makes them feel stronger, accomplished and capable of breaking through limiting barriers. They return home feeling more courageous and ready to face other challenges bravely.

## What words of encouragement do you have for those afraid of joining strangers in a group-travel setting?

We help people step out of their comfort zones. I often tell them that the beautiful surprises that come from the unknown can be incredibly rewarding. Sometimes the strangers we travel with become the people that transform us. Strangers can become friends, and these friends can feel like family. 🌱

Sandra Yeyati is national editor of Natural Awakenings.



To read a longer version of this conversation, visit [TinyURL.com/ProfetaWW](https://tinyurl.com/ProfetaWW) or scan the QR code.

# 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](mailto:matsakis99@gmail.com) and paid listings to [paul@naatlanta.com](mailto:paul@naatlanta.com).

## Thursday, July 9

**The Amethyst Healing Circle** – 6-7:30pm. Experience healing energy with Vicki Evans and a gifted team of energy healers, including focused individual and audience healing. Free. Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore, 5531 Roswell Rd NE, Sandy Springs. [bit.ly/Amethyst-Healing-Circle-070926](https://bit.ly/Amethyst-Healing-Circle-070926).

## Sunday, July 12

**Summer Open House** – 11am-5pm. Explore wellness demos, special offers, yoga classes, energy healing, massage and community connection. Meet gifted practitioners and discover modalities to uplift the body, calm the mind and awaken the spirit. Decatur Healing Arts, 619 E College Ave, Ste A, Decatur.

**Psychic & Wellness Event** – 12-6pm. Holistic wellness fair featuring intuitive readers, energy healers, wellness practitioners, conscious vendors and community. Mimms Museum of Technology and Art, 5000 Commerce Pkwy, Roswell. [bit.ly/Psychic-Wellness-Roswell-071226](https://bit.ly/Psychic-Wellness-Roswell-071226).

**Free Group Energy Healing on Zoom** — 4-6pm est. Carol Nelson, Certified Theta Healer and Access Consciousness Bars Practitioner with 30 years of experience, facilitates a gentle group energy healing designed to help participants release accumulated stress, restore mental clarity, and return to a deep sense of peace and calm. No experience necessary. Free. Virtual/Zoom. To receive Zoom link, subscribe to the free newsletter at [carolnelson.kit.com/manifestation-newsletter](https://carolnelson.kit.com/manifestation-newsletter). 917-963-0262. [trueselfunmasked.com](https://trueselfunmasked.com).

**With Ease: A Nervous System Reset Through Breath & Movement** – 6pm. Guided breathwork and accessible movement experience for nervous system regulation,

tension reduction and body awareness. \$25. Holistic Alignment Strategies, 3475 Dallas Hwy, Bldg 400, Ste 425, Marietta. bit.ly/Breath-And-Movement-071226.

## Tuesday, July 14

**Meditation and Buddhism Class** – 7-9pm. Beginner Zen meditation course with mindfulness practice and Buddhist philosophy. Free; donations accepted. Dharma Jewel Monastery, 2550 Henderson Mill Rd NE, Atlanta. 770-939-5008. bit.ly/Meditation-Buddhism-Atlanta-071426.

## Wednesday, July 15

**Wellness Wednesdays** – 8-8:30am. Kick-start the morning with a 30-minute virtual fitness class followed by complimentary fresh-pressed juice. Free. Kimpton Shane Hotel, 1340 W Peachtree St NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Rise-and-Vibe-Fitness-071526.

**The Big Idea** – 6:30pm. Join Dr. Kris Peterson, DC, for a public anchor talk on health-care myths and truths in upper cervical chiropractic care. Free parking. Kindspine Chiropractic Center, 1830 Piedmont Ave NE, Ste C, Atlanta. bit.ly/Big-Idea-Atlanta-071526.

## Thursday, July 16

**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, July 17

**Peaceful Friday Meditation Class** – 7-8pm. Weekly meditation class offering time to deepen meditation practice and discover inner peace. Free; recommended donation \$7.18. Georgia Meditation Center, 4522 Tilly Mill Rd, Atlanta. bit.ly/Peaceful-Friday-Meditation-071726.

## Saturday, July 18

**YDBG (YourDay Balance Game) Trust Run** – 8-10am. Boost trust and teamwork with a fun, all-ages run focused on connection. Free parking. 5299 Roswell Rd, Ste 120, Atlanta. bit.ly/Ydbg-Trust-Run-071826.

**The Self Care Lab Walk Club** – 8:30-11:30am. Weekly wellness walk along Atlanta Beltline Eastside Trail. Meet at the tables outside Krog Street Market. Free. Atlanta Beltline Eastside Trail, Atlanta. bit.ly/Self-Care-Lab-Walk-071826.

**THE MAN-KĀVE – Atlanta** – 11am-4pm. Join Axis Recovery for a judgment-free mental health experience for men with real conversations, barbershop-style talks, immersive experiences and practical wellness tools.

Morehouse College, 830 Westview Dr SW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Mankave-Atlanta-071826.

## Sunday, July 19

**Girls Who Walk Dunwoody: Weekly Walks** – 10am-12pm. Friendly Sunday walk at Brook Run Park for women to move, chat and connect, with social coffee afterward. Free. Brook Run Park, 4770 North Peachtree Rd, Dunwoody. bit.ly/GirlsWhoWalk-DunWoody-071926.

## Tuesday, July 21

**Pride Pathways: Suicide Prevention for LGBTQ+ Communities and Allies** – 1-2:30pm. Learn suicide risk factors, warning signs, protective environments and prevention resources for LGBTQ+ communities and allies. South Cobb Regional Library, 805 Clay Rd, Mableton. 678-398-5831. bit.ly/Pride-Pathways-Event-072126.

**JULY WOW: Come Alive In Your Body** – 6:30-8pm. Join Good Kitchen for a women's wellness gathering on movement and mobility with Jennifer Gann of Whole Body Systems. Good Kitchen, 2750 Atlanta Rd SE, Ste 110, Smyrna. bit.ly/July-Wow-Movement-072126.

## Wednesday, July 22

**The Crest Walkers** – 9-10am. Walking club for better health, more energy and stronger community, with every step taken together making a difference. Free. Browns Mill Recreation Center, 5101 Browns Mill Rd, Stonecrest. bit.ly/The-Crest-Walkers-072226.

## Saturday, July 25

**Smiles & Miles** – 8:30-10:30am. Join Black Girls Smile for a welcoming wellness walk with mindfulness prompts, mental health conversation and connection. All fitness levels welcome. Silver Comet Trail, Mavell Road Trailhead, Smyrna. bit.ly/Smiles-and-Miles-072526.

**SPC Mental Health Fair** – 9am-12pm. Build mental health strength with resources, support, community connections and stigma-breaking conversations for youth, members and community. Registration encouraged, not required. Saint Philip AME Church, 240 Candler Rd SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Spc-Mental-Health-Fair-072526.

**JTM Fitness Free Abs Class** – 10-11am. Tighten, tone and strengthen your core with a free high-energy abs workout for all fitness levels. Jamie The Motivator, 3365 W Hospital Ave, Ste C, Chamblee. bit.ly/Jtm-Fitness-Free-Abs-Class-072526.

**Reach and Release w/ Coach Angie Be** – 10-11:30am. Free community wellness event with yoga, Reiki and stress release in a supportive environment. Reiki and stretching available with \$10 love offering. Wade Walker Park, 5585 Rockbridge Rd SW, Stone Mountain. bit.ly/Reach-And-Release-Angie-Be-072526.

**4th Georgia ~ Black Men's Mental Health Conference** – 10am-2pm. Conference raising awareness and education around men-

tal health care for Black men, featuring stories, resources, panel discussions and experts. Free; VIP \$28.52. Southwest Arts Center, 915 New Hope Rd SW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Black-Mens-Mental-Health-072526.

## Sunday, July 26

**Pilates in the Park** – 10-11am. Free outdoor classical mat Pilates for all levels, blending breath, intention and accessible progressions to build strength and community. Free. 759 Boulevard SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Pilates-In-The-Park-Atlanta-072626.

**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.

**The Rest Temple** – 2pm. Practice rest, stillness, silent ritual and collective daydreaming with The Anchor and The Nap Ministry. Bring pillows, blankets or other items for resting comfort. Free. 645 Grant St SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Rest-Temple-Atlanta-072626.

## Monday, July 27

**THE TRIGGER vs THE TRAUMA** – 11am-1pm. Join Tyme to Thrive Beyond Grief for a live podcast conversation on violence, trauma, grief, accountability, healing and restoration. Free parking. 568 Lee St SW, Atlanta. bit.ly/The-Trigger-Trauma-Event-072726.

## Tuesday, July 28

**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

## Wednesday, July 29

**EARTHSTRONG Vol 4: A KHÖNA Yoga Series** – 6:30-7:30pm. Transformative yoga, meditation, breathwork and sound healing led by Shelby Adina. Free. Ponce City Market, 675 Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Atlanta. Paid parking. bit.ly/Earthstrong-Vol-4-072926.

## Saturday, August 1

**Black Moms Wellness Walk Meet Up** – 10:30am. Walk, connect, rest and reset with MentalBlkMom, Inc. Meet at the farmers market, then walk from the playground at 11am. Free; donations accepted. Brook Run Park, 4770 N Peachtree Rd, Dunwoody. bit.ly/Black-Moms-Wellness-Walk-080126.

**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 reg-

istration required. Suggested love offering \$20-\$40. Held in the Chapel. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

## Friday, August 7

**Karaoke & Open Mic Night** - 7-9 pm. All are invited to this family-friendly evening of entertainment and fellowship. Karaoke music is provided, or bring your instruments, poetry or any form of artistic expression. Potluck meal. Love offering. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

## ONGOING

### SUNDAYS

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

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

**Red Clay Sangha Sunday Morning Service** – 9am, Sitting/Walking Meditation; 10:30, Morning Service; 10:45am, Dharma Discussion; 11:30am, Close 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 Pranic 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. Efraim 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. July sessions feature the Unity Booklet, “Change Your Thinking Change Your Life.” For more info and to receive the Zoom link, email: xioma735@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 Kelsang Dechok. Talks, guided meditation, discussion and Q&A. All welcome. Kadampa Meditation Center Georgia, 741 Edgewood NE, Atlanta. 678-453-6753. MeditationInGeorgia.org.

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

**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 register 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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# Grief Came to Remind Me

by Toyia Denise

**G**rief does not announce itself. I could be having the best day of my life, standing in line at the grocery store—and then, no warning, BAM. It hits me.

Grief carries pain, love, longing and restoration. It gives as much as it takes. Sometimes it brings me to my knees. Other times, it brings flashes of joy—a glimpse of how much love I can actually hold. The moment that remains so clear to me is the last day I saw the love in my grandma's eyes.

It was one of those hazy August days that flirt with fall air. Eighty-three degrees, warm with a touch of cool breeze. The sky was a deep blue, clouds soft as feathers. I was dressed for a plane ride home after a long summer visit. Casual, ready to move, with a car waiting to take me to the airport.

She was standing at the front door behind the screen, wearing her yellow housecoat. The same one I had seen her in a hundred times. Only now it hung a couple of sizes too big. She was smiling at me, a face full of tears, watching me go. I don't know how. But I knew the weight of that moment. She was thin. Very thin.

Pancreatic cancer had brought her into the fight of her life, and I could see what it was costing her. I knew she probably would not survive it, though I prayed she would. I wanted to hold on so badly. I wanted time to stop, but time is unforgiving. It keeps moving, even when your heart is begging it not to.

Three months later, I got the call. She was gone.

Sometimes grief arrives as a memory. The beautiful, sweet moment of her holding me while I fell asleep in her lap. The smell of her peach cobbler. The feel of her hands running through my hair before she begins to style it. The sound of her voice, humming. The sight of her hands kneading dough.

Maybe grief is love, still moving, still searching, still trying to find somewhere familiar to go.

On a recent trip with my daughter, I was sitting in the back seat listening to a conversation she and her fiancé were having. He was speaking life into her, encouraging her in the way she needed.



Barbara Olsen/Pexels.com

Then I heard the words, "Semayah, you just have to be patient." It was the cadence. The rhythm of the words. The way they landed. It reminded me of my grandma. Of all the times she would say to me, "Baby, you just gotta be patient."

I remember all the sweet sayings she gave me. All the wisdom wrapped in that soft, matter-of-fact, Southern woman's way. The kind of wisdom that did not announce itself as wisdom. It just lived in her voice.

Near the end of the song, I looked up and saw my daughter's face full of tears, too. She looked at me and said, "Mom, you can never leave me." And I knew that feeling.

It was the same feeling I had as I looked back at my grandmother that day long ago, seeing her standing behind the screen door in her yellow housecoat, smiling at me. That same ache. That same reaching. That same prayer for time to stop.

But this time, something in me smiled.

No matter what my daughter said or did, I would never leave her. This thing called life is not big enough to separate me from her. Sometimes you are connected to someone beyond the physical. Beyond location. Beyond what the body alone can hold. That is how I am connected to my grandma. My grandma never left me. Not really. Not in the way love counts leaving. Just like I would never leave my daughter.

Love stays in the sayings, in the songs, in the hands that remember how they were once held. In the voice that rises inside us when we need guidance. In the wisdom we repeat before we even realize it was first spoken over us.

That day in the car, grief did not come to destroy me; it came to remind me. And when I looked up at the sky, it was the same blue. The clouds were soft like feathers. I looked up and said, simply,



"Thank you." 🙏

*Toyia Denise is an Atlanta-based writer, spiritual teacher and executive coach who guides leaders through the patterns and imprints that shape how they lead, live and love. Learn more at ToyiaDenise.com.*

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