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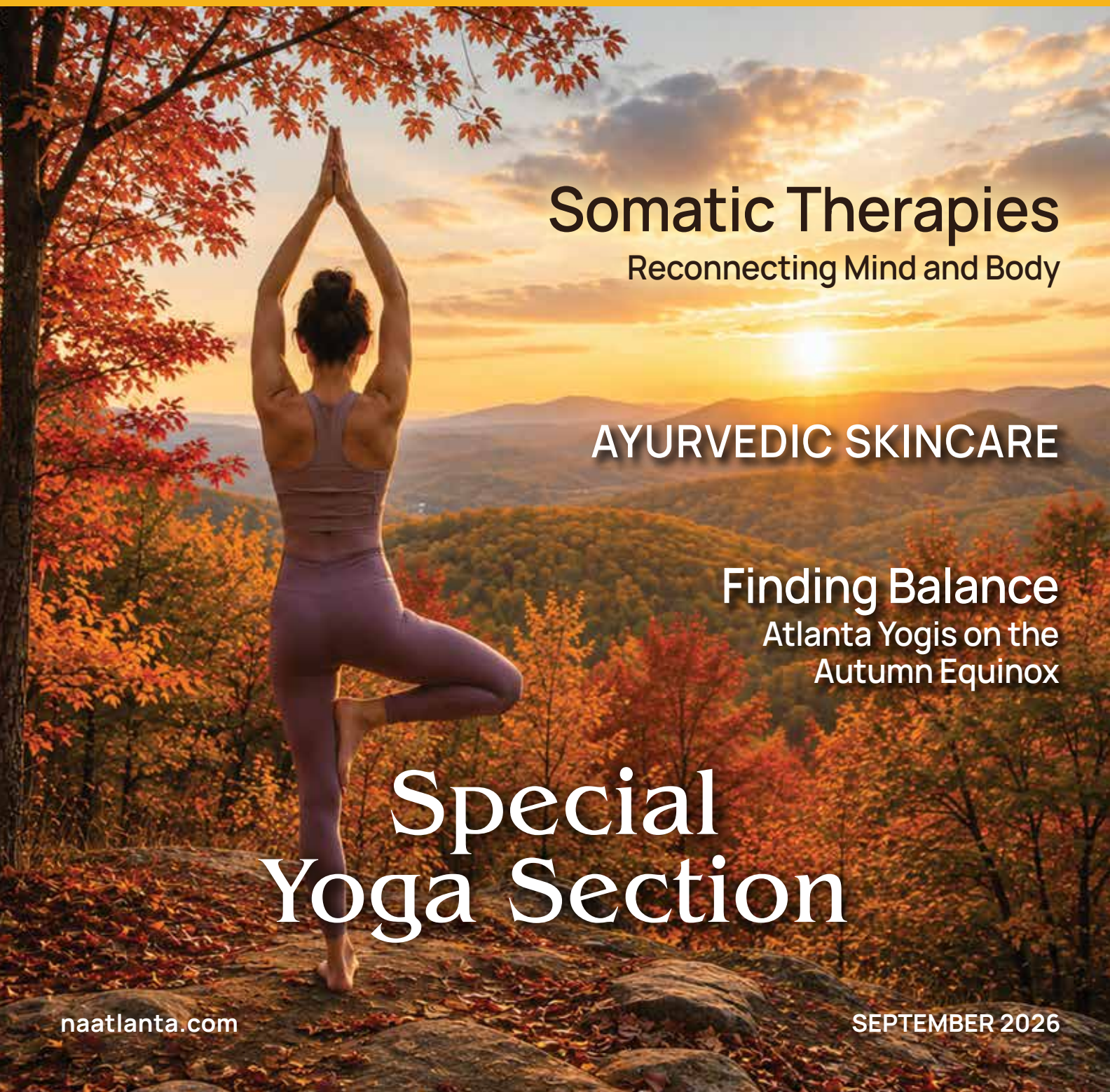

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YOGA
10 Years and Counting

With this, our 10th yoga special issue, I am pleased to introduce Octavia Nasr, our new yoga editor, and bid a grateful adieu to Patty Schmidt, our outgoing editor.

Patty wrote about Octavia in last year's September issue. Born and raised in Lebanon, Octavia discovered yoga in her 30s. She has since received more than 400 hours of training and has developed a robust chanting practice. "We will explore the spiritual, scientific and practical expressions of yoga," says Octavia of the coming months. "The content will be deeply rooted in the yoga tradition, while our coverage will highlight the modern embodiment of traditional principles."

Welcome Octavia! We look forward to you guiding the department in its next phase.

A 2022 Yoga Alliance survey found that among those starting a yoga practice in the U.S., "stress relief/reduction" was the greatest motivator—mentioned by 51 percent of respondents. Flexibility was second at 46 percent. Interestingly, in 2016, it was the reverse: flexibility led with 61 percent, while stress relief/reduction was second at 56 percent.

"As concerns about mental health and loneliness increase around the globe," said then-president and CEO of Yoga Alliance Shannon Roche, "the perception of yoga must shift from solely a fitness modality or hobby to a vital, low-cost, high-value self-directed health intervention that can, and should, be accessible to everyone."

So, it seems that in the last few years, people's perspective about yoga's benefits has shifted from primarily addressing physical needs to addressing issues of mental and emotional well-being. If true, it's astonishing.

But here's the thing. We didn't start a yoga department in this magazine because of yoga's physical benefits. Or, for that matter, its mental health benefits—although that was part of it. When I introduced our first yoga special section 10 years ago, I wrote, "There are several reasons, but the one that matters most is that yoga changes lives." And then I quoted my friend, FORM Yoga owner Mandy Roberts: "Yoga saved my life."

Her sentiment is hardly unique; I've seen it expressed time and time again. And that's because "yoga," that is, the spiritual path that *includes* but is not limited to physical postures, is all about understanding who we really are. Our first yoga editor, Graham Fowler, founder of Peachtree Yoga Center, wrote in his first piece: "We will be looking through the perspective of yoga, but fundamentally, the subject will always be an investigation into the surface and depth of you, your own being."

When I first learned that asana is one of the eight limbs of the spiritual path of yoga, I understood that the reason for it is that one needs to train to sit in meditation. Indeed, the Indian spiritual leader Sadhguru says so unequivocally. "The body can become a means for your spiritual growth, or it can become a major barrier," he says. "If you can sit in a posture, stable and comfortable, for two and a half hours, then we say you have attained *asana siddhi,*" which is "the mastery of yoga postures allowing one to sit comfortably for extended periods during meditation."

To be clear, the main reason this magazine has a yoga department is so that we can publish articles of a spiritual nature that encourage practitioners to be not only physically and emotionally fit, but to grow in love and compassion. It is also to grow in the perspective that Graham articulated in his very first words: "From the way the planets move, to the changing of the seasons, to the way plants grow, there is an intelligence that abides as the true essence of everything." Primarily, our yoga department has been about encouraging practitioners to realize for themselves "the true essence of everything."

That's why, in the 2022 survey of yoga practitioners, the finding that surprised me most was that, out of the eight "motivators to start yoga," the ones that placed #5 and #6 were personal development and spiritual development—at 29 percent and 27 percent, respectively. While these rankings are low, their percentages are much higher than I expected. They demonstrate that, anytime we publish a yoga article that's more about "union"—which is, after all, the definition of "yoga"—than it is about asanas, we're writing for a sizable segment.

That puts a smile on my face. And it gives me hope for a better world.

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.*

ISTA Holds 20th Sound Conference

The International Sound Therapy Association will hold its 20th ISTA Sound Conference 2026, October 2 through 4, at the Omni Atlanta Hotel at Centennial Park, and an additional full day of classes on October 5.

Dr. John Beaulieu

Jeralyn Glass

Christine Stevens

Founded in Atlanta by Mandara Cromwell, ISTA promotes education and professional standards in sound therapy and now has members worldwide. Its training includes certification for sound practitioners who work in hospitals, nursing homes, hospice facilities and community settings.

The conference is designed for sound healers, therapists, musicians, educators, researchers, wellness professionals and people who are simply "sound curious." Attendees can participate in workshops and demonstrations, explore emerging research, learn about new instruments and techniques and connect with practitioners from around the world.

Featured presenters include Dr. John Beaulieu, a pioneer in tuning fork therapy, psychoacoustics, and integrative sound healing; Jeralyn Glass, a crystal singing bowl artist, educator, and founder of Crystal Cadence; and Christine Stevens, a music therapist, author, and founder of UpBeat Drum Circles. Three Trees will also offer immersive sound experiences.

"This conference is not just looking back at where we came from; we are reaching into the future of where ISTA and the world of sound therapy are going," Cromwell says.

Registration costs $534 for the three-day conference. October 5 classes are priced separately. For more information, visit ISTASounds.org. The Omni Atlanta Hotel at Centennial Park is located at 190 Marietta St. in Atlanta.

Mega Meditation Summit Features Three-Day Program

The nonprofit organizations Pyramid Spiritual Society Movement (PSSM) Global and PSSM USA are presenting a three-day Mega Meditation Summit at Clayton Performing Arts Center from September 25 through 27.

The event is described as a global consciousness revolution featuring speakers who will discuss meditation and new-age spiritual concepts. According to its website, the program is for "anyone ready to step into their highest potential and expand their consciousness."

The summit has been held in Texas, North Carolina and California over the past three years. Organizers report that meditation enthusiasts travel from across the United States to attend.

Photo courtesy of PSSM Global

Programming includes a morning meditation from 6 to 8 a.m., followed by additional programming throughout the day. The summit features vendors focused on bio-energy, ancient wisdom and healing modalities. MMS-4 for Next Gen offers fun activities, learning sessions and workshops for children.

Tickets are $25 for the three days. Free food is provided, and children ages five to 13 get in free. All children and youth up to 19 must be accompanied by an adult.

The Mega Meditation Summit takes place at Denmark High School, 645 Mullinax Rd, Alpharetta. For more information, visit pssmglobal.com.

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September Brings Two Atlanta Food Festivals

Attendees at Veggie Taste 2018. Photo: Tonesha Smith

Two Atlanta food festivals return in September, with The Veggie Taste offering plant-based food and wellness programming on September 19 and the Original Collard Greens Cultural Festival celebrating African and African American culture September 26 and 27.

Returning for its 16th year, The Veggie Taste runs from 2 to 7 p.m. September 19 at the Shrine of the Black Madonna. The outdoor festival features vegan, raw and plant-based dishes prepared by chefs and food vendors from across the region, including vegan barbecue, raw dishes and artisanal desserts.

Programming also includes workshops on plant-based nutrition, talks on holistic healing, eco-friendly and cruelty-free products and activities for children. Founder and organizer Nyemay Aya says the event introduces attendees to both the flavors and practical aspects of plant-based eating. "Attendees can taste how delicious and flavorful healthy food can be and can learn how affordable eating healthier is."

One week later, the 17th annual Original Collard Greens Cultural Festival takes place at Hillside International Truth Center. Sponsored by The Food Studio, the two-day festival combines food with live entertainment, wellness, sustainability and community activities.

Admission to the festival is free, while a $40 Taste of Collard Greens ticket allows attendees to sample collard greens dishes prepared by local chefs. The festival also features the Collard Greens Cook-off with a $500 prize, and collard greens ice cream. A Wellness Pavilion, Sustainability Pavilion and Sproutland Pavilion for children offer additional programming, including waste management relays, horseback riding, magic, storytelling and hands-on activities.

Founded in California in 1998, the Original Collard Greens Cultural Festival (OCGCF) has been part of the metro Atlanta community for years. "We are excited to celebrate the festival's 17th year in Georgia and to continue our commitment to uplifting the community," says Cheryl Johnson, OCGCF Vice President.

Limited complimentary general admission tickets are available for The Veggie Taste. After those are claimed, general admission is $5, an admission-and-taste-ticket combination is $20 and five additional taste tickets are $15. For more information, follow @theveggietaste1 on Instagram or visit TheVeggieTaste.com. The Shrine of the Black Madonna is located at 946 Ralph David Abernathy Boulevard Southwest in Atlanta.

The Original Collard Greens Cultural Festival runs from noon to 7 p.m. September 26 and from 1 to 5 p.m. September 27. For more information, visit OriginalCollardGreensCulturalFestival.com. Hillside International Truth Center is located at 2450 Cascade Road in Atlanta.

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ON HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy Under the Microscope

An Evidence-Based Look at a Controversial Therapy

by Athena Eamon · Reviewed by Lauri Grossman, DC, CCH, RSHom(NA)

Rawf8 from Getty Images Signature/CanvaPro

To evaluate evidence-based research for a health treatment, it is important to comprehend the research methodology, study design, included and excluded evidence, and the potential existence of bias in the study's design, execution or funding. This understanding is essential before drawing any conclusions.

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are the gold standard for evaluating the efficacy of medical treatments with minimal bias and determining if an intervention surpasses placebo effects. However, individualized homeopathy poses unique methodological challenges that differ from testing a standardized pharmaceutical drug.

Unlike conventional RCT drug trials, where all participants with the same diagnosis typically receive the same medication and dose and are evaluated uniformly over specified time periods, classical homeopathy is tailored to the individual patient rather than the disease diagnosis. Two patients with migraines, seasonal allergies or arthritis may receive different remedies based on their physical symptoms, emotional state, sleep patterns, food cravings, environmental sensitivities, personality traits and

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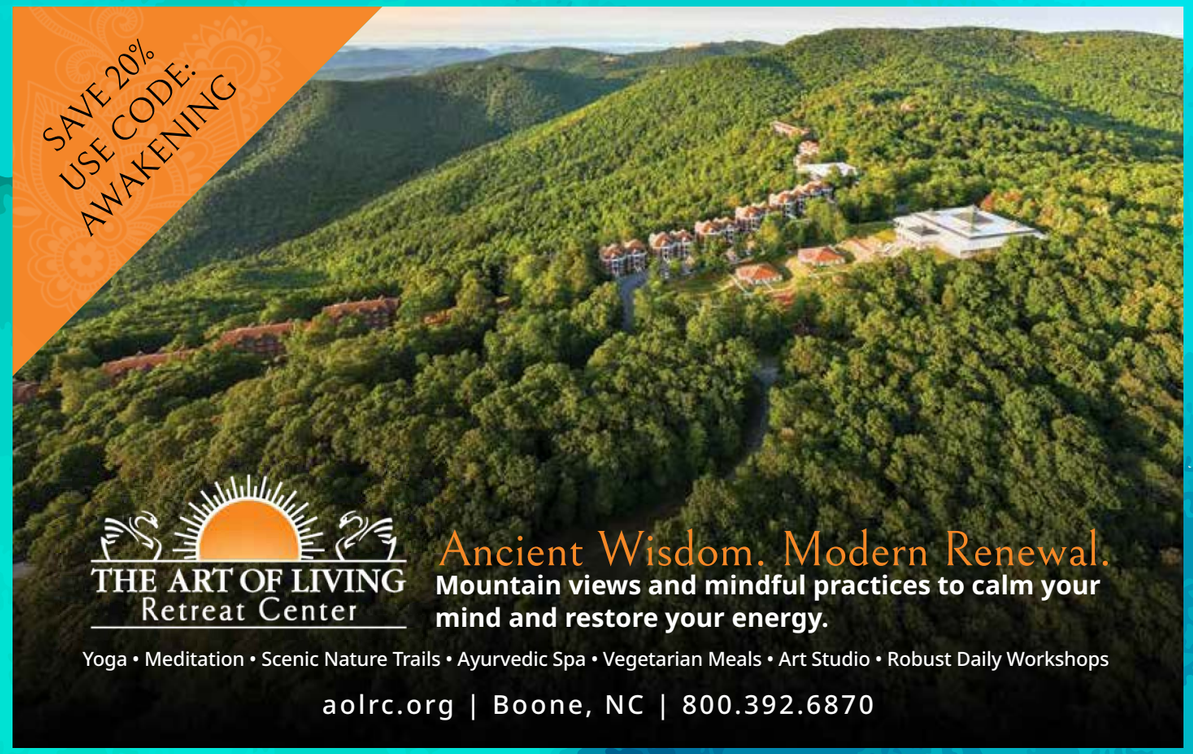

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Nutritious Nachos

Yummy Ideas Everyone Will Love

by Maya Whitman

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Nachos are a classic favorite for fall gatherings, sports parties, game nights and cozy weekends, but traditional versions can quickly become overloaded with oversized portions, excess sodium, unhealthy fats and highly processed ingredients. To make nachos a healthier option, consider making a few simple changes that balance favorite toppings with nutrient-dense ingredients.

"It can be tempting to cover everything in cheese or really pile on the meat, but you can actually dial down these indulgent elements and add so much flavor in healthier ways," says James Rayner, senior editorial manager of FoodFaithFitness, an online resource for simple and healthy recipe ideas.

Traditionally, nachos are served as an appetizer, but they can easily be elevated to main meal status. Cumin-spiced mushroom and walnut vegan nachos, chicken nachos with zesty Greek yogurt crema, sheet pan sweet potatoes and black beans, or Mediterranean-based whole-grain pita chips with smashed garbanzos and feta are only a few inspiring examples.

Mouthwatering Upgrades

Dan Whalen, a lifelong enthusiast for this popular comfort food, authored the cookbook *Nachos for Dinner: Surprising Sheet Pan Meals the Whole Family Will Love.* "What I love about nachos is that you can make them with leftovers. Just open your fridge and find a combo of things," he says. It all begins with a chip base, protein source, colorful vegetables and fiber-rich toppings such as avocado, fire-roasted tomatoes, fresh salsas, homemade slaws, pickled onions, tangy citrus splashes or fresh chiles.

Whalen, also a food blogger and the founder of the online recipe hub The Food in My Beard, reminds us that switching things up doesn't require eliminating our favorite fixings. "One secret to using indulgent toppings is to make sure everything is chopped up small," he explains. "You always want to do this anyway, so each chip can hold a mix of all the different ingredients. Doing this with more indulgent nacho toppings allows you to use less but still feel like it is prevalent in the overall dish."

Steak or pulled pork lovers can opt for shredded leaner cuts, while seasoned, sautéed ground turkey or chicken breast serves as an excellent substitute for ground beef. Vegans can enjoy meaty textures with sautéed, crumbled tempeh or tofu. And everyone can enjoy the flavorful, hearty protein provided by pinto, black or red kidney beans. Rayner notes, "Whatever protein you're going for, don't forget to add plenty of seasoning. You can also try toasted pepitas [pumpkin seeds] or crushed almonds for added taste and texture."

Whalen suggests upgrading the chips, explaining, "Using crispy plantain chips cuts out the extra carbs and fat in traditional tortilla chips. You can even use dehydrated or baked plantains instead of fried."

Ethnic Inspirations

Although traditionally Tex-Mex, nachos can be most exciting with creative variation. For Rayner, the use of Indian spices can tantalize taste buds and broaden the possibilities. "Think generously spiced tandoori chicken with red onion, cilantro and a creamy sauce made from Greek yogurt and mint," muses the editor. He also favors the idea of a deconstructed Greek gyro with "thinly sliced lamb or beef, charred bell peppers, chopped herbs and a garlicky Greek yogurt drizzle to finish."

Whalen embraces Italian flavors, recreating a loaded sandwich. "I use all the typical meats, and when it comes out of the oven, I add a 'salad' of romaine lettuce, roasted red peppers and pepperoncini."

Drizzling punchy sauces such as sweet yet savory Mexican *chamoy* made from pickled apricots, plums or mangoes, or bright and spicy Middle Eastern green *shatta* can add an exhilarating element to any nacho dish.

Assembly Tips

For optimal tortilla nachos every time, Rayner recommends briefly toasting the chips in the oven for two to three minutes to unlock nutty flavors and enhance the crunch. "After that, layer your toppings. Veggies can release a lot of moisture, so scatter your protein over your chip base first, then cheese and vegetables afterward. Repeat the layers if you want to go all out."

Maya Whitman is a frequent writer for Natural Awakenings.

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MEXICAN MINI BELL PEPPER NACHOS

Satisfy nacho cravings without the chips.

YIELD: 6 SERVINGS

Courtesy of FoodFaithFitness

½ lb lean ground beef
26 mini bell peppers
6 Tbsp salsa
1 cup shredded, reduced-fat Mexican cheese blend, packed (4 oz)
½ cup tomato, diced
¼ cup green onion, diced
1 large avocado, diced
Cilantro, chopped (for garnish)

Preheat oven to 400° F.

Heat a medium pan over medium-high heat and add the ground beef. Cook, breaking up meat into pieces, until no longer pink inside.

Cut the stem off each pepper and cut in half lengthwise, removing the seeds and white flesh.

Spray a baking sheet with cooking spray and arrange the peppers on it, cut sides up.

Stir the salsa into the cooked beef and fill the peppers with the beef mixture. Sprinkle with the cheese.

Bake until the cheese is melted, about 5 to 7 minutes.

Sprinkle on the tomato, green onion, avocado and cilantro. Serve immediately.

Recipe courtesy of FoodFaithFitness.

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Introduction to Somatic Therapies

Reconnecting Mind and Body in an Overstimulated World

by Sheldon C. Baker

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We are often told to "just breathe" when we feel distressed, overreactive, overstimulated, hyper-vigilant, exhausted or digitally overloaded. Stress is a common consequence of modern life, and sometimes, a few deep breaths can provide relief. However, when stress becomes ever-present and deep-seated, we may need a bit more help to release the tension in our muscles and to lower our heightened blood pressure out of fight-flight-or-freeze mode.

Somatic healing practices can provide a reset through movement and body awareness. According to Gina Nick, Ph.D., a naturopathic physician with 25 years of experience and an integrative medical practice in Los Angeles, "Somatic therapies are designed to address physical tension and release the stored emotions and stressors housed in the body." These practices—which can be performed at home or with the help of a professional—forge a healthy, fluent connection between the mind and body by creating heightened self-awareness and boosting recovery and resilience. The result is sustained calmness and an improved ability to achieve serenity, focus and cognitive clarity.

Noticing the Body's Messages

"Chronic stress doesn't just affect your thoughts. It changes your biology," explains Daniel Amen, M.D., a double board-certified psychiatrist, neuroscientist and author of multiple national bestsellers, including *Change Your Brain, Change Your Pain: Breaking the Doom Loop to Heal Chronic Physical and Emotional Pain*. "When stress hormones stay elevated for too long, they increase muscle tension, fire up inflammation and contribute to chronic pain. They also disrupt sleep, impair digestion and can even reduce blood flow to the brain, making you feel anxious, exhausted or mentally foggy."

Somatic therapy relies on interoception—awareness of body sensations—to identify and release stress and trauma. These sensations originate from the autonomic nervous system, which governs involuntary bodily functions like heart rate and digestion. Examples of negative body sensations include clenching muscles, racing pulse, stomach churning, temperature fluctuations, tightness around the chest and tingling.

Steven Bradshaw, a psychologist, somatic experiencing practitioner and founder of Beyond Psychology Center, in Los Angeles, explains that the autonomic nervous system features two sub-systems that regulate safety: the sympathetic nervous system that mobilizes the body for action in dangerous situations and the parasympathetic nervous system to promote calmness and recovery. Chronic stress or trauma can get stuck in the sympathetic nervous system, causing a state of constant alertness. "The body is safety for the mind," he remarks. "I use a mind-body approach that engages your inner healer to move from states of anxiety, burnout, disconnection and pain into states of goodness, flow and a deep sense of belonging in your own body."

Aimie Apigian, M.D., MS, MPH, founder of Trauma Healing Accelerated and author of *The Biology of Trauma: How the Body Holds Fear, Pain, and Overwhelm, and How to Heal It,* explains, "Somatic therapies are body-based approaches that work at the level of sensation. Sometimes that means creating a sensation of safety in the body, and sometimes it means creating the sensation of overcoming a moment of powerlessness from the past, often through movement, by finally doing the self-defense movement you were not able to do when the real event happened. The benefit is that we uncouple a sensation from the meaning of danger it got paired with. That can be an internal sensation, like the twisting of your gut, or an external one, like a particular sight or smell. The sensation stops automatically signaling danger, and the body gets to learn a new response rather than only understanding the old one."

Mind-Body Practices

"As anyone who has ever danced knows, our feelings can be more readily accessed through movement and getting in touch with our body's sensations, which is what somatic therapy does," says Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., a board-certified internist specializing in chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, sleep and pain, as well as the

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author of several books, including *Pain Relief in 4 Simple Steps: Eliminating the Root Causes of Chronic Pain.* While conventional talk therapy focuses on using the rational mind to release embedded stress, daily body-awareness activities can help people learn to process their tension while building emotional resilience.

Amen recommends starting with basic practices, including slow diaphragmatic breathing, daily body movements, good quality sleep and time spent in nature. One of his favorite calming strategies is the butterfly hug to soothe the brain and body. "Simply place your hands on your opposite shoulders and gently stroke them downward," he explains.

Other self-somatic therapies can calm the body and mind, creating a sense of safety, which quiets racing thoughts and brightens the person's outlook. "The aim of a daily practice is to create a sensation of internal safety or a felt sense of support in the body," Apigian counsels.

Four-Count Breath: An excellent tension reliever and mental refresh, the four-count breath can be performed anywhere at any time. Inhale fully while counting to four, hold for four, exhale for four and pause for four. Repeat up to five times.

Body Scan: This exercise is all about interoception and is done by noticing sensations from head to toe while sitting or lying down comfortably.

Full-Body Shake: Standing up and shaking arms, legs and shoulders for 30 seconds not only loosen limbs but also relieves pent-up stress. Rolling the head in a circular motion can also release knotted tension at the base of the neck.

Humming: The vibrations from humming (either a tune or single note like an "Om") physically calms the vagus nerve, which bidirectionally carries information via electrical and chemical messages to and from the brain. A 2023 study published in the medical journal *Cureus* involving 23 participants revealed that humming significantly lowered stress biomarkers compared to physical activity and sleep, with positive impacts on the parasympathetic nervous system to reduce the fight-or-flight response.

Mindful Movement: Moving with intention and body awareness can deepen in-the-moment joy and appreciation while also reducing anxiety, releasing tension and improving mood. Start with deep breathing, then turn attention inward for a head-to-toe body check while moving. This can be practiced while washing the dishes or participating in a fitness class.

Guided Imagery: A technique that can be performed alone or with a therapist, guided imagery utilizes breathwork and meditation while envisioning an object or scene, using all of the senses. Capitalizing on the mind-body connection, multisensory visualization reduces stress and relaxes muscles.

Guided Therapies

Long-term, somatic therapies with the help of expert practitioners can result in creating healthier habitual emotional patterns, which contribute to repairing mood imbalance and creating sustained well-being.

Craniosacral therapy is a gentle, hands-on approach that releases physical tension to enhance relaxation. It focuses on the skull, spine and craniosacral system, which includes the cerebrospinal fluid, fascia and soft tissues surrounding the central nervous system. A 2023 study published in *Behavioral Sciences* (Basel, Switzerland) involving male firefighter cadets found that five weekly sessions of craniosacral therapy significantly reduced cortisol levels, a primary stress hormone.

Rolfing somatic movement is a touch-based technique designed to unblock or release protective posture patterns such as shrugged shoulders, bent postures and clenched jawlines from unresolved stress, anxiety and trauma. According to the Dr. Ida Rolf Institute, Rolfing resets the body's stress response by releasing restrictions in the fascia—the connective tissue network that surrounds, separates and holds together the body's muscles, bones, organs, blood vessels and nerve fibers.

Trauma-sensitive yoga or trauma-informed yoga is designed to cultivate a compassionate awareness of what is happening in the body in the present moment and to develop the ability to take effective action based on that knowledge. It empowers individuals to reconnect with their bodies in a safe, non-judgmental environment and regulate the nervous system. A 2018 qualitative analysis published in *International Journal of Stress Management* identified key emotional themes that emerged from engaging in trauma-sensitive yoga, including gratitude, compassion, relatedness, acceptance, centeredness and empowerment.

Somatic experiencing is a specialized therapy designed to retrain the nervous system by processing trauma in small, manageable sessions. Instead of focusing on the story of the trauma, the therapist guides the client to notice physical sensations, while providing a feeling of safety and well-being. This treatment approach releases vestigial negativity and creates a new, intuitive, more deeply self-aware and empowered way of sustaining emotional well-being. A 2021 literature review published in *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* reported that somatic experiencing positively impacts symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder, notably reducing affective and somatic complaints while improving overall well-being.

Eye-Movement Therapies

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) centers on moving the eyes in a specific manner while being guided to process traumatic or stressful memories, which are stored differently than normal or happy ones. Reprocessing helps to repair mind injury caused by the traumatic event.

Brainspotting (BSP), a newer neuro-based therapy, uses eye position or "brainspots" to access and release unresolved emotional energy stored in the limbic system and subcortical region of the brain. Compared to EMDR, BSP is more somatic and intuitive. In a 2022 study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, just one 40-minute session of EMDR or BSP was found to have beneficial effects in processing distressing memories.

Finding Relief and Resolution

"Somatic therapies recognize that many emotional and physical symptoms are protective responses rather than a mental disorder, weakness or failure," says Annie Wright, a licensed psychotherapist and relational trauma specialist. Acknowledging and observing our discomfort paves the way for a healing conversation with ourselves. ❧

Sheldon C. Baker is a contributing editor to numerous health, wellness and lifestyle publications.

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Has "Normal" Become the New Standard for Feeling Unwell?

Somewhere along the way, many of us quietly lowered our expectations for what it means to feel healthy.

We expect to be tired after lunch. We assume brain fog comes with age. We joke about needing coffee just to function, wear our stress like a badge of honor, and accept poor sleep as part of being busy. Digestive discomfort after meals becomes routine. Aches and pains are blamed on getting older. We tell ourselves that feeling "off" is simply what adulthood looks like.

But what if it isn't?

Perhaps the most concerning shift in modern health isn't that chronic illness has become more common—it's that feeling less than our best has become so familiar that we no longer question it. We've normalized surviving instead of thriving.

Our culture celebrates productivity, often at the expense of well-being. We applaud people who push through exhaustion, skip meals to meet deadlines, answer emails late into the night, and continue working despite obvious signs that their bodies are asking for rest. In many ways, we've become better at ignoring our health than listening to it.

The human body, however, has an incredible way of communicating. It rarely jumps from perfect health to serious disease overnight. Instead, it whispers. Energy begins to decline. Sleep becomes less restorative. Focus becomes more difficult. Recovery takes longer. Small inconveniences slowly become daily companions. Because these changes happen gradually, they often escape our attention until they've become our new normal.

Imagine driving your car every day with the check engine light illuminated. At first, it might make you nervous. After a few weeks, you stop noticing it altogether. The light hasn't disappeared; you've simply become accustomed to seeing it. Eventually, you forget it was ever unusual.

Our health often follows the same pattern.

The body is remarkably adaptable. It compensates. It reroutes. It works overtime to keep us functioning even when something is out of balance. But adaptation isn't the same as optimal health. Just because your body has learned to function under stress doesn't mean it was designed to stay there forever.

One reason this matters is because health exists on a spectrum. Too often, we think in extremes—we're either healthy or we're sick. In reality, there is a vast space in between. Someone may not have a diagnosable disease while still experiencing low energy, persistent inflammation, poor resilience, recurring headaches, digestive discomfort, or difficulty concentrating. These experiences can significantly affect quality of life, even if they don't fit neatly into a diagnosis.

This is where curiosity becomes one of the most valuable tools in healthcare.

Instead of asking, "Is something seriously wrong?" perhaps a better question is, "Is my body functioning as well as it could be?"

That subtle shift changes everything. It moves the conversation away from simply waiting for illness and toward actively cultivating health. It encourages people to become students of their own bodies—to notice patterns, recognize changes, and understand that symptoms are information rather than inconveniences to silence.

Modern technology has transformed nearly every part of our lives, yet many people still know remarkably little about how their own bodies function. We track our finances, monitor our home's security from our phones, and receive instant notifications when our devices need updates. Yet when our own bodies begin sending signals, we often dismiss them as normal because we've become accustomed to living with them.

True wellness isn't measured by how well you tolerate feeling unwell. It's measured by how fully you're able to participate in your life. Do you wake up refreshed? Can you think clearly throughout the day? Do you have energy left for your family after work? Does your body recover well after physical activity? Are you living with vitality or simply getting by?

These questions don't require perfection, nor do they suggest that every symptom points to a serious problem. Instead, they invite us to raise our expectations for what health can look like.

At Progressive Medical Center, we've learned over more than 27 years that some of the most meaningful conversations begin with a simple realization: feeling "normal" isn't always the same as feeling well. Rather than accepting symptoms as an inevitable part of life, we believe they deserve thoughtful exploration and a personalized approach that considers the whole person—not just isolated complaints.

Perhaps the greatest investment we can make isn't waiting until something goes wrong. It's refusing to settle for a version of health that simply gets us through the day. Because when we stop accepting "normal" as the standard and begin pursuing true wellness, we don't just add years to life—we add life to those years.

For more information, visit: bit.ly/pmc-our-approach

Tik Tok vs. Ancient Skincare For Modern Times

by Susan Gonzalez

Open any social media platform, and there will be dozens of new skincare trends and fads that promise everything from "smoother skin in one day" to "wrinkles faded in one hour!" The trend usually involves a revolutionary discovery of a cream or serum that must be purchased "Now! Before they're all gone!"

Compare those unrealistic empty promises with adopting a skincare practice rooted in a more than 2,000-year-old traditional holistic medical system, namely, Ayurveda.

Galiya Tenisheva/Pexels.com

"Ayurveda" derives from the Sanskrit *āyus*, meaning life or longevity, and *veda*, meaning knowledge. One of the world's oldest medical traditions, Ayurveda began in India more than 2,000 years ago, with roots in ancient Vedic healing practices. The practice recognizes and works with the connections among the human body, nature and the elements of the universe to promote overall health.

Ayurvedic medicine is based upon the five natural elements: ether/space, air, fire, water, and earth. With these elements, the human body is formed into three body types, or *doshas—vata, pitta* and *kapha*. Identifying body types can be helpful, but not necessary, when exploring Ayurvedic skincare.

Skin health and youthfulness are deeply rooted in the principles of Ayurvedic medicine.

"Rather than viewing the skin as an isolated organ, Ayurveda sees it as a reflection of overall balance," says Taru Vanjani, owner of the Ayurvedic skincare company, Spin Organics. After Vanjani was diagnosed with Hashimoto's disease, a thyroid disorder, in 2012, she began searching for answers to restore her health. Her career as a chemical-environmental engineer paired with her Indian heritage led her to Ayurveda. "The condition of the skin is influenced by digestion, nutrition, sleep, stress, daily routines, seasonal changes and each person's unique constitution, their *prakriti*"—their innate blueprint or constitutional makeup.

Working Together in Harmony

Vanjani notes the difference between current skincare philosophy and the Ayurvedic approach. "Modern skincare often focuses on isolated, active ingredients designed to address a single concern—wrinkles, pigmentation, dryness, acne or inflammation. Ayurvedic skincare instead creates comprehensive formulations where numerous botanicals work together in harmony."

With Ayurvedic skincare, the whole body, face and scalp are treated, nourished and pampered, and the skincare formulations are often fragrant and beautiful. Some of the plant oils and botanicals used on the skin include almond, sesame and coconut oils mixed

Photo: Akesh Patel

Taru Vanjani

with plants like turmeric, gotu kola, neem. lotus, saffron and rose.

Prana is the life force within all living things, and "Ayurveda teaches that every living plant carries its own prana," says Vanjani. "The way herbs are grown, harvested, prepared, and combined influences how they ultimately support the skin. Traditional formulations were designed not simply to extract isolated compounds, but to preserve the plant's complete vitality and to work in harmony with the body's own natural intelligence."

Using plants to nourish the skin also increases the prana in the skin and the body, says Vanjani. If the plants are processed in a whole, clean form, they're able to retain their prana, and the skin can then absorb that energy during skincare practices.

Balance Is the Goal

Dr. Medha Garud

Dr. Medha Garud is the director of the Ayurvedic Program at The Art of Living Center in Boone, North Carolina. She emphasizes treating the skin holistically by paying attention to what's happening on the skin as well as what's happening in and around the body, energetically and emotionally.

"Know that whatever is outside is also within us—as is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm. And like increases like; opposites balance. So if we are in sync with nature's rhythms, we are healthy."

Mental and emotional states can have a direct impact on skin health, she says, and both relate to the person's dosha. "Anxiety causes a vata imbalance, which can cause dryness in the skin." And straw breath, a slow, controlled breathing practice with exhales longer than inhales, is great for decreasing vata and helps keep the skin hydrated.

"Frustration or irritation can create pitta imbalance and acne and rashes on the skin," she says. She recommends doing alternate nostril breathing to balance the right and left hemispheres and settle and calm the mind.

A kapha imbalance, which is often expressed as sluggishness, can cause very oily skin, and she recommends practicing *kapalbhati*, a breathing technique similar to but different from the "breath of fire." The method "can stimulate the fire [within], remove the sluggishness in the body and mind and help restore skin's balance."

Garud lists four essentials for beautiful, healthy skin: Getting to bed by 10:00 p.m.; waking between 5:00 and 6:00 a.m.; doing 30 minutes of exercise a day until you "sweat a little so that the pores shed off toxins;" and regular elimination. Also, "for skin to be radiant, gut health is key. If the stomach is clean and clear, it will reflect in the skin."

Clear and Radiant

Jayashree Ramamurthy, a clinical Ayurveda practitioner, is helping individuals balance their seasonal wellness through Ayurvedic food preparation. Ramamurthy agrees with the idea that a clean and balanced "inside" reveals a clear and radiant "outside."

"Skin health depends on what goes inside," she says. "Eating a seasonal, whole foods-based diet with appropriate hydration goes a long way toward maintaining skin health. Also, an oil massage of the whole body before a hot shower or bath helps lock in moisture, and the oil also acts as a gentle cleanser. Avoid harsh soaps and body washes. Massaging the scalp—let us not forget that it is also skin!" For oily scalps, "a little oil or aloe vera gel before a shampoo helps maintain scalp health."

Ritual and Caring for Ourselves

There's also a spiritual aspect to Ayurvedic skincare, says Vanjani. "In Ayurveda, self-care is viewed as much more than a cosmetic routine—it is an opportunity to cultivate mindfulness and reconnect with yourself."

Photo: Dona Pietsch

Jayashree Ramamurthy

Taking a few moments each day to massage botanical oils into the skin, she says, can encourage us to slow down, breathe deeply and become more present. "Rather than treating skincare as another task to rush through, Ayurveda invites us to transform it into a daily ritual of nourishment and gratitude. In many ways, the act of caring for your skin becomes an act of caring for your whole self."

Starting an Ayurvedic skincare routine can be as easy as incorporating a holistic Ayurvedic facial oil into your existing routine and gradually swapping out products for clean ones that adhere to the Ayurvedic standards, while exploring a few lifestyle changes into your daily routine.

In a world where chasing the Fountain of Youth can seem like running on a hamster wheel, the 5,000-year-old practice of Ayurveda offers a solution that not only delivers radiant skin, but a healthy mind and body as well. ❧

Susan Gonzalez is a holistic licensed esthetician, author, nurse and owner of MOON Organics, a skincare company providing clean, healthy skincare and personal care products. Reach her on Facebook and Instagram or visit MoonOrganics.com.

Additional Resources

- *Several websites offer a free questionnaire to determine your dosha. This one comes from an Atlanta practitioner who hand scores your survey and returns results within 24 hours: bit.ly/eads-dosha*
- *See our previously published articles on Ayurveda at: bit.ly/naa-ayurveda-t*

Continued from page 11

constitution. As a result, researchers designing and conducting homeopathy trials face the following challenges that hinder the use of testing models developed for single pharmaceutical compounds:

- Participants with the same diagnosis often receive different remedies, making it difficult to standardize interventions across a trial.
- Homeopaths frequently adjust remedies as symptoms evolve, whereas conventional RCTs require treatments to remain fixed throughout the study.
- Homeopathic care includes lengthy consultations, individualized assessments, follow-up visits and therapeutic relationships that may independently contribute to outcomes beyond the remedy itself.
- Patients may seek improvements in well-being, energy, resilience or quality of life in addition to symptom relief, yet clinical trials measure only disease-specific endpoints.

What Clinical Studies Demonstrate

Many studies on homeopathy exist, but their quality differs greatly. Some treatments, such as *Arnica montana* for pain management, show more promising evidence than others. Systematic reviews, which are top-tier research tools that compile, evaluate and synthesize empirical studies, find the evidence on homeopathy inconclusive due to issues like small sample sizes, inconsistent study designs, varying prescribing methods, difficulty blinding individualized treatments, publication bias and poor methodologies. These limitations prevent the determination of whether benefits are due to specific homeopathic effects, nonspecific therapeutic effects, placebo responses or a combination of all three.

Some Reviews Reach Divergent Conclusions

Systematic reviews can reach different conclusions due to varying inclusion criteria. One review might include all studies regardless of quality, while another might focus only on larger trials or low-risk-of-bias studies. These design differences affect the conclusions. For example, the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council found no reliable evidence supporting homeopathy for any health condition after analyzing only studies with strict methodological criteria.

By contrast, a meta-analysis conducted by the University of Bern in Germany specifically focused on individualized homeopathy. The analysis concluded that statistically significant effects may exist for treating conditions such as childhood diarrhea, respiratory conditions and post-surgical recovery, but the certainty of evidence remains low to moderate due to study limitations.

The Scientific Debate Extends Beyond Clinical Trials

Perhaps the greatest controversy about homeopathy pertains to its mechanism rather than its clinical outcomes. Many homeopathic medicines are diluted beyond Avogadro's limit, leaving no measurable molecules of the original substance. Conventional chemistry and pharmacology struggle to explain how these highly diluted remedies could produce biological effects. Homeopathy researchers argue that these findings, along with advances in understanding complex biological systems, justify further investigation into mechanisms involving nanostructures, water organization, electromagnetic signaling and other physical processes that are not yet fully understood.

A Growing Consensus for More Research Arises

Scientists on both sides of the homeopathy debate agree that future research must combine the methodological rigor of randomized trials with study designs that more accurately reflect clinical practice. This requires larger sample sizes, transparent reporting, standardized outcome measures, longer follow-up periods and independent replication across multiple research centers. Additionally, homeopathy study designs should better align the research methodology with the intervention being studied without sacrificing scientific rigor.

The goal is to maintain the standard for evidence while formulating research questions that accurately represent the personalized nature of homeopathy practice. This approach will yield clearer insights into where homeopathy offers meaningful benefits, where it falls short and how it can best contribute to evidence-informed, patient-centered integrative healthcare.

Athena Eamon is a researcher and parent with nearly two decades of experience studying and using homeopathy, integrative health and whole-person wellness.

Dr. Lauri Grossman has more than 30 years of experience as an integrative care expert, chiropractor, classical homeopath and global educator.

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Mindful Interdependence

A Conversation With Jeremy David Engels

by Sandra Yeyati

Jeremy David Engels is a liberal arts endowed professor of communication arts and sciences at Penn State University, co-founder of Yoga Lab and a mindfulness and yoga teacher. He has authored six books, including his latest two published this year: *On Mindful Democracy: A Declaration of Interdependence to Mend a Fractured World* and *Living Namaste: A Practical Guide to Mindfulness, Yoga, and Building Community.*

Engels holds a master's degree (2003) and doctorate (2006) in rhetoric from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has also studied Sanskrit, yoga philosophy, pranayama (breathing techniques) and chanting at the prestigious Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram. After a pilgrimage to India and Nepal in 2018, following the Buddha's footsteps, he became a devoted student of mindfulness meditation as taught by Zen master and peace activist Thích Nhất Hạnh. He was certified to teach mindfulness after completing an intensive, two-year training program under Tara Brach and Jack Kornfield.

Why did you aspire to be a teacher and peace advocate as a child, and how did you uphold those ideals into adulthood?

I grew up surrounded by shouting and naturally became the peacemaker. This trait is inherent and influenced by my environment, deeply ingrained in my personality. In high school, I first encountered the works of Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Tolstoy and Thoreau's writings on civil disobedience and nonviolence. These books spoke to my soul and became a part of who I am. I identify as a peacemaker and relationship builder.

Courtesy of Jeremy David Engels

What subjects do you teach at Penn State?

My Ph.D. is in rhetoric, which focuses on the power of language to build and break worlds, bring people together and push them apart, incite wars and foster peace. My classes reflect this focus. I teach communication ethics, looking at how people can communicate better to build stronger communities and healthier relationships. I teach a big lecture class on propaganda, exploring how we are manipulated and how to resist it. And, I teach classes on how to deliberate, debate or argue without devolving into a fight.

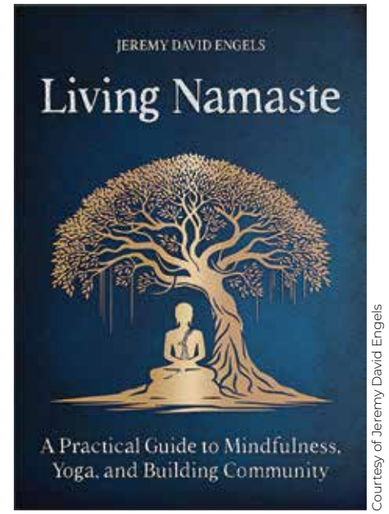
How do you incorporate mindfulness in your college classes?

Historical writings by the founders of the United States assumed citizens were capable of paying attention without distraction. We can't make that assumption anymore, given our current world of distractions. Mindfulness is a wonderful practice for this. Everything I teach is better absorbed when students have mindfulness skills.

What do you propose in your book, Living Namaste?

We often say "namaste" to each other at the end of yoga practice, but for me, it doesn't mark an end but rather a moment of continuation, when we take the practice from the mat into the world. Namaste means, "I bow to you. I honor you. I recognize you. I honor the dignity of you." Over time, it has become associated with bowing or honoring the divine in someone else.

The philosophy of namaste is that every time you say hello to someone, you acknowledge their dignity, worth, beauty and miraculousness, even when you disagree on fundamental things. Our relationships transform when we are willing to meet people on that common ground of shared divinity.



Courtesy of Jeremy David Engels

As a rhetorician, in the spirit of namaste, which words should we use more frequently and which should we reduce?

My next book will include a chapter on the mindfulness of words and noticing how often we bring violent words into everyday conversations. We talk about fighting this or fighting that, going to war, having a battle. We need to become more conscious of this because describing our relationships with others as a war increases the likelihood of those relationships becoming combative.

One word I like is "friends". It's an invitation to a certain kind of relationship. Instead of preparing for battle, perhaps we should be getting ready for a conversation.

How can we become more interconnected when our society seems to keep us distracted and divided?

We have never been more connected to news and information in the history of the world. Social media gives us access to more people than ever before, but we feel lonelier because those are not genuine relationships. Real relationships with embodied human beings make life worth living and nourish the spirit. A key motivation behind my books is to encourage people to open up to others and recognize our deep interdependence.

What do you mean by interdependence?

Interdependence is an insight, not just a concept to understand intellectually. It's something you have to feel in your body. Meditation is one path to this understanding, but not the only one. Many religions, science, theoretical physics and ecology all teach interdependence. A forest exemplifies it. It's not just that we have to collaborate with people we may have written off, dislike or rarely consider. It's that we are already working together in unseen ways.

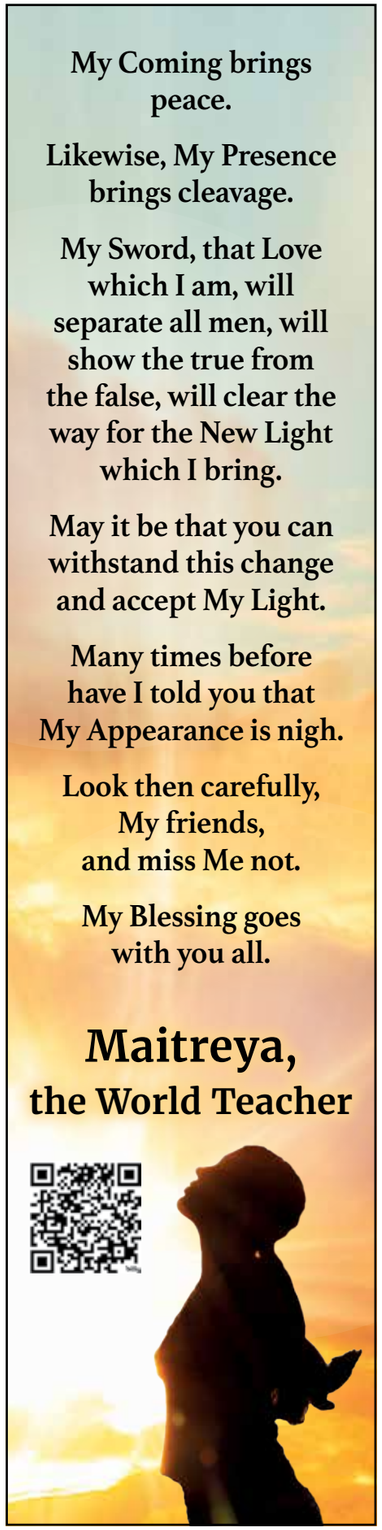
Think about prescription medication: from research and development to your medicine cabinet, it's staggering to think about the countless individuals that have touched that pill or shot—scientists, medicine developers, trial participants, ingredient harvesters and assemblers, plant operators, label designers, bottle makers, shipping workers, truck drivers and pharmacists. That's interdependence.

I hope my work helps to awaken people to our inherent connection. Imagine how much stronger we would be if we acknowledged this interdependence and actively devoted our attention and energy to building things together. There is such profound untapped power in the human species. Even little bits of awakening to this power will go a long way. ❧

Sandra Yeyati is the national editor of Natural Awakenings.

To read a longer version of this conversation, visit TinyURL.com/EngelsWW or scan the QR code.

> *There are years that ask questions and years that answer.*
>
> —Zora Neale Hurston



My Yoga Journey

by Octavia Nasr

Photo: Chayan Dutta

Octavia Nasr in Rishikesh, India, in 2018.

There's a first time for everything—including yoga practice. That first encounter can come as a total coincidence—a studio's free first class, a friend or the friend of a friend just got their certification and is teaching in their backyard, a gym membership that includes yoga classes, or a doctor recommending yoga for a flexible body or quiet mind. For me, it was an unplanned but welcome distraction in the middle of a journalism career burnout phase. It came after 9/11 and the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq that followed. As CNN's senior editor for Mideast affairs, I was constantly on call and had to monitor, translate, analyze and report on the most harrowing news. In a quiet moment between headlines, my boss recommended taking time off. So, I intentionally shut down the work noise and retreated into a home renovation project.

A few weeks into the project, my interior designer, who's now a friend, invited me to join her for a yoga class in her client's home studio. Without expectations and nothing to lose, I went along. I took the right-side corner spot in the back of a simple, unadorned room, unfurled a yoga mat the teacher had lent me, placed it on the thickly carpeted floor and watched people file in. There was a mix of about twelve people in attendance. The regulars exchanged smiles around the space and stretched their bodies while the teacher checked more attendees in. Not knowing what to do, I waited patiently for instructions.

Class started unceremoniously, and the poses were simple and unchallenging at first. As the class progressed, the postures felt nurturing and uplifting. We concluded with a full-body tensing and releasing practice before we let go in *savasana*, or "corpse pose" in Sanskrit, an invitation into complete stillness.

The savasana sealed the deal for me. For a moment, I felt the weight of the world had lifted off my mind; I was empty of worry and full of life at the same time. There was so much to unpack and so much to learn. So, I went back for more.

I progressed in postural yoga, thanks to accomplished teachers who shared their knowledge and experience. There followed self-study through books, mantra-chanting music and *pranayama*—complex breath work that steadies the vital energy through breath control. I absorbed everything I could learn, applying it not just to my yoga practice, but to my life. While something within me was always seeking more, it took a while before I realized that the "more" I was yearning for wasn't about more classes or workshops, but more *yoga*. And while I didn't grasp the amplitude of what that meant at the time, I knew one thing—India was calling me.

My first pilgrimage to India a few years later took me to Rishikesh, "the yoga capital of the world," as my copy of Lonely Planet's India travel guide described it. In its pages, I discovered a new word—*ashram*, or communal sanctuary in Indian traditions—and a couple of them caught my eye. The book explained that "only serious students" of yoga could stay and study there, a minimum residency of 15 days was required, and every day would start at 4:30 a.m. "sharp."

In spite of the warnings, I signed up with the Parmarth Niketan Ashram. It was the first of many journeys I'd take to the foothills of the Himalayas and the banks of the Ganges.

The night I arrived in Rishikesh, I attended *Ganga Aarti*—a festival of lights by the Ganges. Leading the ceremony was the ashram's president—a Hindu monk, his disciple, and a veiled woman with an angelic voice and a gaze filled with love and compassion. She was surrounded by school-age boys dressed in clean and well-ironed saffron robes, chanting and swaying as if in a trance. I quickly learned that the Ganga Aarti is a widely popular nightly celebration that attracts locals and visitors alike. It is an immersive experience of high vibration and devotional chanting while a fire pit is set ablaze. Devotees then feed the fire with ghee, incense and sacred seeds. The ceremony climaxes when several shiny brass lamps are passed around through the crowd. Each person gets the chance to draw circles with the dancing flames as if making offerings to the Ganges. The setting seemed like a scene out of a movie, perfectly choreographed and executed with precision. I immersed myself in the experience and felt right at home.

The evening concluded with a silent vegan dinner in the ashram canteen. That night, walking through the ashram's meticulously maintained gardens to my room, my heart fluttered with joy at the privilege of being there. Also, in anticipation of my first day as an ashram yoga student.

At 4:30 am, a loud, insistent hand-struck bell awakened me for morning prayer. Through the large windows of my room, pitch dark and very cold, the river Ganges appeared still and majestic. I got ready in total silence, threw on the oversized wool shawl I had bought at the market the day before and, with a small flashlight in hand, headed to Satsang Hall. I sat on the floor next to a handful of elderly women on the left while the same young monks from the previous night sat on the right with a handful of older men behind them. A caretaker set up a cushion, harmonium and microphone in the center between the two sides facing an altar where a male monk sat a bit higher on a cushion facing us.

At 5:00 a.m., a woman walked in through a side door, sat down and started playing the harmonium and chanting into the microphone. She directed the young men through call-and-response Sanskrit prayers. In the faint pre-dawn light of the hall, I recognized the female monk from the night before and reveled in her voice as it soared through the morning silence.

In the morning's yoga philosophy course, I met her officially. Sadhvi Abha Saraswati was lovingly referred to as "Mataji" or revered mother. For the next two weeks, we engaged in yoga practice, chanting and meditation alongside our Vedanta studies. We broke for meals, rested or walked by the Ganges and participated in the evening Aarti. As the lead yoga educator, Mataji taught mantra chanting to the young postulants who live, study and serve at the ashram. As my visits to Rishikesh became more frequent, I joined the boys sitting at her feet, practicing call-and-response, and was initiated into my mantra chanting journey. That's when we officially became student and teacher. I have taken a dozen trips to India over the years, and I still fervently perform the same rituals, never taking such a privilege for granted.

A year later, life brought another Himalayan monk into my life, but this time closer to home, when Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati, or "Swami J," became my teacher. Swami J lived and taught in his ashram in Fort Walton Beach, Florida. A direct student of Swami Rama of the Himalayas, his teachings aligned significantly with Mataji's. I visited him on many occasions and attended countless lectures of his. Since his retirement and move to Virginia, I have continued to study with him, mainly online. His experiential erudition and applied non-dual scholasticism supported me through thousands of hours in various yoga teacher trainings and advanced certifications. It also informed my graduate thesis on the identity of yoga and how it changed from its traditional messages to our modern day.

Twenty-three years since my first yoga class, journalism remains my passion and a tool to talk about my love for all things yoga. After about two decades of practice, and half of that teaching yoga as well, I share my key insights about yoga:

Yoga is a direct experience. The union of the individual self with the cosmic Self. You can achieve it through postures, meditation, ocean contemplation, or mountain climbing, among other immersions.

Yoga is inclusive. It is an unbroken stream of consciousness passed through the ages from teacher to student. It does not belong to one person or one group.

Yoga is a lifestyle. It is a way to *be* in this world when who you are, what you think and what you say are in alignment.

Savasana is magical. In this deceptively powerful pose, your body shifts from stress into deep healing. Marinate in its emptiness and silence. Permit intentions to crystallize and invite manifestations to realize.

Yoga is a personal practice. While you might have many facilitators, your ultimate teacher is the one residing in your heart.

Born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon, Octavia Nasr, our new yoga editor, spent two decades at CNN as a news editor and anchor and has been teaching yoga since 2015. Follow Octavia and pitch her stories on Instagram @OctaviaEightfold.

Atlanta Yoga and The Autumn Equinox

by Octavia Nasr

Gina Minyard

The autumn equinox, occurring on September 26, marks the sun's passage directly over the equator, creating a nearly equal length of day and night. It is the official beginning of fall and, for many communities, it is a time that invites introspection. Three Atlanta yoga teachers dive into the season's spiritual lessons and explore the rich connections between yoga and daily life through nature's cyclical transition.

"Think of it as a threshold, like dawn and dusk," says Gina Minyard, one of Atlanta's most seasoned yoga teachers. "When opposites meet, something else emerges. Because of that, the equinox is an extraordinarily potent time for expanding consciousness," she says. "When I offer teachings around seasonal rhythms," she adds, "I often see something awaken in people. It touches something that is deeply embedded in their DNA."

Minyard believes the human physiology is deeply connected to the seasons. "We feel these shifts because we are part of nature," she says. "The autumn equinox arrives as we emerge from the fullness and brightness of summer. For a brief moment, light and darkness, warmth and coolness, are in harmony. A perfect opportunity for recalibration."

Minyard considers herself "a nature mystic." She remembers spending countless hours by the creek in the backyard of her childhood home, feeling "deeply connected to the intelligence and wisdom of nature." Her interest in Celtic earth-based spirituality introduced her to the seasonal calendar, the solstices, equinoxes, and the cross-quarter days that mark the transitions between seasons. From her training in Anusara Yoga, a modern school of the foundational branch of hatha yoga, Minyard emphasizes "teaching through themes that inspire the heart and awaken spiritual awareness."

In the context of a yoga practice, Minyard considers the autumn equinox an invitation to move into balance. Breath is always her "starting place." This means cooling off, pausing, resting and shedding what is not needed. "Balance means longer, deeper exhales until we cultivate an evenness between inhale and exhale," she says. Consequently, she includes an alternate nostril breathing exercise for a fall equinox-themed class because "it embodies the interplay between sun and moon energies."

"The equinox is also a season of activation," Minyard adds. She incorporates poses that naturally fit the season, such as tree pose and warrior III, "because they ask us to stabilize ourselves and be in energetic alignment and balance." She draws on her yoga teacher training, in which every pose is fundamentally about balance. Thus, she says, "the practice itself teaches us to create equilibrium through opposing actions—strength and expansion, drawing inward and radiating outward." This play on opposites can be expressed in a class that pushes students to regain balance in breath and movement, then ground and rest in more restorative poses like child's pose and cobra.

While Minyard's focus is on balance and grounding, Brett Erickson hones in on stillness and renewal in her September equinox offerings. She believes the change in weather "mirrors what's happening internally." In contrast to summer's outward, yang energy, she says, the fall equinox is a time of introspection—a potent time to review one's life and ask, "What am I letting go of from the previous season and what am I inviting in?"

Photo: Elsbabeth Ulvem

Brett Erickson

Erickson has been a dancer since she was four and brings this "early connection between body, mind and spirit" into her yogic lifestyle and teachings. She developed a desire to create seasonal yoga events from her early fondness for how nature "informs our sense of time, place and inner life," she says. As a result, she co-founded her business, reSource, in 2024 "to lead mini retreats around seasonal themes."

"For the September equinox, I'll focus on what we're bringing into the darker months of the year," she says. "It is also the final harvest, an invitation to notice what is still ripening and coming forth." Erickson plans to encourage self-care ahead of the final quarter of the year as people move into the stress of the holidays.

To achieve her vision, Erickson includes natural elements to cultivate awareness and self-nourishment. For this year's equinox, she plans to create an altar with fresh seasonal foods and autumnal grounding elements such as wood, herbs and flowers. The practice will include box breathing—equal time inhaled and exhaled with pauses in between—sun salutations, a dancer pose and a variety of yin poses for a passive stretch.

Erickson and her sound-healing partner, Mika Newton, offer an experience to awaken a sense of balance, grounding and gratitude. "I always bring poetry. It is a meaningful part of my offering," she says. And as an artist with a background in textile and graphic design, she plans to paint an abstract watercolor for the occasion, and turn the poem and painting into printed copies for her students to take home as a remembrance of the practice and community. It's a "simple offering," she says, but one that participants appreciate, as it gives them "something tangible and personal" to receive.

Joiful Yoga studio owner and Kundalini-trained yoga teacher Cassie Dowell takes a positive—even joyous—approach to the fall equinox. She focuses on stepping into a fresh new slate and celebrating what is yet to come.

"In a single year," she says, "I left my corporate career, became an empty nester and went through a divorce." Using her own life as an example, Dowell says she chooses not to dwell on the pain of endings. She encourages her students to consider the "beauty" that emerges from the experience instead. She believes that gratitude is the most important part of the autumn equinox. "Endings are difficult," Dowell affirms, "but I choose to focus on gratitude for everything the previous season gave me."

Through the equinox yoga class, she wants her students to use the fullness of the season as a stepping stone into their truth.

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To place an ad here, inquire at ads@naAtlanta.com.

CALENDAR

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7
Mat Pilates – 3-4pm. Guided mat Pilates focused on core strength, controlled movement, breathwork, flexibility and full-body alignment. All levels welcome. $23.18. FitSquad Studios, 1240 Metropolitan Place SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Mat-Pilates-Atlanta-090726.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13
Reynoldstown Flow + Farmer's Market – 10-11am. All-levels vinyasa flow with energizing movement and grounding stretches, followed by community time and the farmers market. Donation-based; $10 suggested. Lang Carson Recreation Center, 100 Flat Shoals Ave SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Reynoldstown-Yoga-Market-091326.

Sol-Rise Sundays: FREE Yoga in the Park – 11am-noon. Beginner-friendly Yin yoga with high-vibrational R&B, stretching and relaxation. Bring a mat, blanket and water. Free. Yellow River Park, 3232 Juhan Rd SW, Stone Mountain. bit.ly/Solrise-Sundays-Yoga-091326.

Creating Harmony in Body, Mind & Soul – 1-7:30pm. Immersive retreat with breathwork, meditation and energy practices for healing, integration and inner peace. Facilitated by Hülya Sögüt and Dan Ellis. Yoga experience recommended. $125 early bird; $150 after August 30. Dan@livingpresent.energy. bit.ly/Vista-Yoga

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14
Hot Pilates Push – 7-8pm. Low-impact, high-energy workout blending Pilates and strength training with core control, sculpting, endurance and intentional movement. All fitness levels welcome. $23.18. Creatives Rental Space, 1483 Chattahoochee Ave NW, Suite 110, Atlanta. bit.ly/Hot-Pilates-Push-091426.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15
Atlanta Laughter Yoga Club – 5:30-6:15pm. Certified Laughter Yoga Teacher Celeste Greene leads laughter exercises, deep breathing and playful activities in a supportive setting. Free. Trolley Barn, 963 Edgewood Ave NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Atlanta-Laughter-Yoga-Club-091526.

Yoga Class – Sweet Life – 6-6:45pm. Relaxed, beginner-friendly yoga with simple poses designed to help you unwind, stretch and boost energy. $17.85. Kindred Healing Center, 1800 Jonesboro Rd SE, 4th Floor, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-Class-Sweet-Life-091526.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16
"Almost Free" Yoga – 6:30-7:30pm. All-levels community yoga focused on movement, stretching, breathing and connection. $10.78. Medical & Sports Massage, 6000 Lake Forrest Dr NW, Suite 375, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Yoga-Run-Sandy-Springs-091626.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20
Sunday Morning Yoga @ The Interlock – 10-11am. Free all-levels community yoga to stretch, breathe, reset and connect. Bring a mat, water and towel. Weather permitting. The Interlock, 1115 Howell Mill Rd NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-The-Interlock-092026.

Yoga & Sound Bath Experience – 4-5pm. Beginner-friendly yoga flow with live singing bowls and guided meditation for grounding, emotional release and relaxation. All levels. $15. 1800 Jonesboro Rd SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Yoga-Sound-Bath-Atlanta-092026.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22
Yoga in the Park with Dancing Dogs Yoga | powered by lululemon – 6pm. Outdoor hour-long yoga flow for all experience levels. Bring a mat and water. Free. The Promenade at Piedmont Park, Greensward Path, Atlanta. bit.ly/Dancing-Dogs-Yoga-092226.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23
Chill Yoga with The Regulated Room – 7-8pm. Yoga, breathwork, mindfulness and stress-management practices designed to support nervous system regulation and relaxation. $15; free for Kindred Self-Care Members. Kindred Healing Center, 1800 Jonesboro Rd SE, 4th Floor, Atlanta. bit.ly/Chill-Yoga-Regulated-Room-092326.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26
Zen at Zephyr with Yoga.ATL – 9:30am. All-levels vinyasa-yin yoga linking breath and movement to strengthen and soften. Bring a mat; outdoor class. Free; donations optional. Zephyr Boulevard SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Zen-At-Zephyr-Yoga-092626.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29
Candlelight Vinyasa & Yin Tuesdays – 6:30-7:45pm. Candlelit, all-levels vinyasa flow followed by centering yin with instructor Mallory Hazen. $25.24. Neutral Moon Studio, 141 Mangum St SW, Suite 300, Atlanta. bit.ly/Candlelight-Vinyasa-Yin-092926.

TRAP YOGA @ The Interlock Atlanta – 6:30-8pm. High-energy vinyasa flow with music, movement and community, led by Brandon Copeland. Beginners and seasoned yogis welcome. Free. The Interlock, 1115 Howell Mill Rd NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Trap-Yoga-Interlock-092926.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30
Yoga on the Green (Fall Sessions) – 6-7pm. All-levels yoga with pose options for beginners through advanced practitioners. Bring a mat or towel and water. Free. Greenville St. Park, 51 Greenville St., Newnan. bit.ly/Newnan-Yoga-Green-093026.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3
Morning Yoga at Pittsburgh Yards – 9-10am. Energizing outdoor vinyasa flow at the James Bridge Field Community Green. Bring a yoga mat, water, towel and props. Free. Pittsburgh Yards, Atlanta. bit.ly/Morning-Yoga-Pittsburgh-Yards-100326.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4
Warrior Yoga – 4pm. Free yoga and meditation event fostering resilience, health and community among veterans. Camp Southern Ground, 100 Southern Ground Pkwy, Fayetteville. bit.ly/Warrior-Yoga-Fayetteville-100426.

She frames autumn as a harvest season, not merely of crops, but of experiences, relationships and personal growth. A time for yoga practitioners to explore who they want to become and what seeds they wish to plant next. "By doing so, students will see their situation as a phase that will eventually pass." The point is to bring the questions to awareness and align with the season.

The poses Dowell will curate for the autumn equinox this fall will revolve around tree pose. "With the hands in prayer and the attention turned inward, it beautifully embodies the spirit of the equinox," she says. She'll also include a ritual such as writing down what one wants to release and symbolically burning it. Journaling is another staple she uses in her classes to highlight conscious living through self-inquiry. For example, she might prompt students to ask themselves: "What beautiful memories did I create in my marriage? What skills did I develop in my career? What gifts came from raising three children?"

Photo: Marjoni (sic) McBride

Cassie Dowell

Dowell finds the equinox is a perfect time to incorporate a derivative of the mantra sat nam, which is Sanskrit for "truth is my identity." It brings, she says, "the understanding of birth, life, death and rebirth. The cyclical nature of all things." She raises her hand and moves through her fingers as she repeats, "sa ta na ma," a chanted version of sat nam, meant to break old habits and navigate life's cycles. The chant helps one become deeply present, not take things personally, and allow the transformation to take shape, she says.

For Minyard, Erickson and Dowell, the autumn equinox is more than a date on the calendar. It is a period of deep shifts in nature and within ourselves. "I celebrate the seasons of my life," says Dowell, "especially those that are ending. I offer gratitude for everything they brought me." Minyard shares some advice for the equinox: "Trust the cycles. After every inhale, there is an exhale and after every season of growth comes a season of release." And Erickson sets an intention: "Ground and let go with gratitude. Step into the richness of the fall season in balance."

Erickson's "Autumn Equinox Yin + Soundbath: Ground & Let Go" will take place from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on September 19 at The Intown Retreat, 102 Church St., Decatur. McDowell's "Autumn Equinox: A Women's Harvest Ceremony" will take place from 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. on September 19 at Joiful Yoga, 205 Hilderbrand Dr., Sandy Springs.

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Yoga Briefs

October Brings a Rare Pairing of Yoga Festivals

Photo: Moon Fire Photos

Dirty South Yoga Fest

Atlanta yoga enthusiasts have a rare opportunity to attend two major yoga festivals in October: the Atlanta Hispanic Yoga Festival returns on October 4, and Dirty South Yoga Fest follows two weeks later on October 17. While the festivals offer distinct experiences, both emphasize community, accessible wellness, and opportunities to explore yoga beyond a traditional studio setting.

Returning for its second year, The Atlanta Hispanic Yoga Festival runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on October 4 at The Westside Warehouse. Presented by lululemon, the Latina-led festival works to make yoga and wellness more accessible to Atlanta's Hispanic community by reducing language and economic barriers. Following a sold-out inaugural year, the festival offers bilingual, Hispanic-led programming including Vinyasa, Yin, a cacao ceremony, a men's-only class, alignment and inversions workshops and sound bath sessions.

The festival also includes a Latin artisan market, food trucks, live entertainment, raffles and free community health services. Community partners include the Latin American Association, Latino Community Fund, Grady Hospital and Walgreens. The event is open to ages 16 and older and includes free parking.

Two weeks later, the Dirty South Yoga Fest returns for its 11th year from 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. October 17 at The Loudermilk Center in downtown Atlanta. This year, the longtime festival moves from summer to fall and shifts from a two-and-a-half-day gathering to a single-day format, with lululemon returning as title sponsor.

The theme, "Community in Practice," organizes programming around seven Community Paths inspired by the chakra system: Grounding, Creativity, Courage, Compassion, Voice, Curiosity and Connection. Attendees can build their day around restorative practice, power yoga, breathwork, storytelling, meditation and community-focused experiences. Workshops, marketplace vendors and opportunities to connect with teachers and other attendees lead into the Dirty South Social, an evening gathering with drinks, vendors and community.

"Yoga is how we gather, community is why we come back," says festival director Danielle Brunson. "This year's Community Paths structure lets every attendee build a day that actually fits what they need, whether that's stillness, movement or connection."

Atlanta Hispanic Yoga Festival tickets range from $30 to $100. For more information, email ahyfest@gmail.com or visit AtlantaHispanicYogaFestival.com. The Westside Warehouse is located at 996 Huff Road NW in Atlanta.

Dirty South Yoga Fest tickets range from $133 to $156, including fees and taxes. For more information, email info@dirtysouthyogafest.com or visit DirtySouthYogaFest.com. The Loudermilk Center is located at 40 Courtland St. NE in Atlanta.

Disclosure: Natural Awakenings *is a sponsor of both festivals.*

Atlanta Hispanic Yoga Festival

Giving Tree Yoga Hosts 108 Sun Salutations Fundraiser

Giving Tree Yoga Center hosts its annual fundraiser, 108 Sun Salutations with Kirtan and Relaxation, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on September 20 at the Smyrna Community Center. All proceeds benefit Food4lives ATL, a service founded by students from Georgia Tech and Emory University to feed and educate those in need.

Karina Carmichael, co-owner of Giving Tree Yoga Center, leads participants through the traditional challenge of completing 108 sun salutations. Athens-based kirtan artists Radha Rose and her husband, Josh, provide live devotional chanting during the practice, followed by relaxation.

Carmichael founded the fundraising event in Scotland in 2008 as an extended yoga class at first, and later expanded it into an annual fundraising event and yoga festival. Now offered through Giving Tree Yoga Center in Smyrna, the gathering combines physical practice, kirtan and charitable giving.

While the event is typically well attended, Carmichael says she still hopes to reach "the magic number of 108 participants."

Registration is $54 per person. For more information, call 770-626-1559 or visit GivingTreeYogaSmyrna.com. Smyrna's Community Center is located at 1250 Powder Spring St.

> *Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.*
> —Stephen R. Covey

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.

Friday, August 28

Introduction to Transmission Meditation – 7:30pm. Free online event sponsored by Share International USA. Free. Info: 770-302-2208 or Info-se@share-international.us. Register: tinyurl.com/3mnedyr5.

Saturday, Sept 5 & Oct 3

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.

Wednesday, September 9

Mocha Mom Wellness Walk Wednesdays – 8:30-9:30am. Midweek wellness walk for moms to move, connect, chat and enjoy fresh air together. Free. Cauley Creek Park, 7255 Bell Rd, Johns Creek. bit.ly/Mocha-Mom-Wellness-Walk-090926.

Thursday, Sept 10

The Amethyst Healing Circle – 6pm. Experience a healing circle with Vicki Evans and six energy healers, including personalized energy work for selected participants and attendees. Free. Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore, 5531 Roswell Rd NE, Sandy Springs. bit.ly/Amethyst-Healing-Sandy-Springs-091026.

World Day of Prayer Service – 7-8 pm.Unity Atlanta Church joins Unity Worldwide with this year's theme, "Love is Alive." This special service will feature a time of reflective prayer and guided meditation. Music by Music Director Simon Needle. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

Saturday, September 12

Atlanta Kidney Walk 2026 – 8-11:30am. Two-mile community walk raising awareness and funds for kidney health. Walk begins at 9am. Free; registration required. The Battery Atlanta, 800 Battery Ave SE, Atlanta. kidneywalk.org/atlanta.

2026 Skyland Trail 5K Run/Walk – 8am-noon. Family-friendly 5K supporting mental health treatment and reducing financial barriers for families. Virtual participation available. $35. Skyland Trail J. Rex Fuqua Campus, 2830 Dresden Dr, Atlanta. bit.ly/Skyland-Trail-5k-2026-091226.

NT Wellness Circle Walk: Cardio & Coffee at Chastain Park – 9-11am. Join a 2.8–3-mile group walk for all paces, followed by coffee and connection. Free. Meet at Chastain Park tennis courts, 4403 Powers Ferry Rd NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Chastain-Park-Coffee-091226.

Sunday, September 13

Gentle Stretching And Breath-Work: Mind-Body Connection Through Movement – 10am. Free class with gentle stretching, breath-work, meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi and Qigong. Ages 16+. Body & Brain Decatur, 308 W Ponce de Leon Ave, Decatur. 678-750-3246. bit.ly/Breath-Work-Mind-Body-091326.

Eben Ezer French SDA Community Health Fair – 2-6pm. Free family-friendly fair with health screenings, wellness education, community resources, giveaways, food and kids' activities. Vendor opportunities available. 851 Constitution Rd SE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Eben-Ezer-Health-Fair-091326.

Tuesday, September 15

September WOW Gathering: Clean Living DIY Workshop – 6:30-8pm. Women Owning Wellness members share DIY workshops using basic ingredients to clean up food, household and personal care products. Free. Good Kitchen, 2750 Atlanta Rd SE, Suite 110, Smyrna. bit.ly/Clean-Living-Diy-Workshop-091526.

Thursday, September 17

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.

HIPS & MOTION with Sweet Life – 7-7:45pm. Beginner-friendly mindful movement with hip mobility, flexibility, gentle stretching, balance and stress relief. Yoga mats provided. $15. Kindred Healing Center, 1800 Jonesboro Rd SE, 4th Floor, Atlanta. bit.ly/Hips-And-Motion-091726.

Saturday, September 19

The Self Care Lab Walk Club – 9-11am. Weekly wellness walk along Atlanta's BeltLine focused on movement, connection and self-care. All ages welcome. Free. Meet at tables outside Krog Street Market, Atlanta BeltLine Eastside Trail. bit.ly/Self-Care-Lab-Walk-091926.

SAGE Saturdays – 11am. Monthly health and wellness gathering featuring low-impact workouts, workshops, demonstrations, rooftop garden tours, healthy food and beverage demos, local artisans and farmers market vendors. Free. 348 Auburn Ave NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Sage-Saturdays-091926.

Feng Shui For Your Home and Life – Noon-1:30pm. Certified Practitioner Roberta Grant covers history, principles, Bagua Map, Five Elements, Ch'i Energy, enhancements and clutter clearing. Printouts and giveaways provided. $10. Phoenix & Dragon Bookstore, 5531 Roswell Rd NE, Sandy Springs. Roberta FengShui.com.

Wednesday, September 23

Free Jump Rope + Mobility Class – 7-10pm. Join Coach Perry for jump rope workouts and intentional stretching designed for all fitness levels. Free. Avondale Estates Town Green, 64 North Avondale Rd, Avondale Estates. bit.ly/Jump-Rope-Mobility-Class-092326.

Saturday, September 26

Free Downtown Yoga at Founder's Green – 10-11am. All-levels outdoor Vinyasa Flow for all ages and skill levels. Bring your own mat and water. Free with registration. Founder's Green, 110 Broad Street SW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Founders-Green-Yoga-092626.

E+ROSE Saturday Sweat Series X Courtney Hanft – Part 2 – 10am-noon. Two-mile BeltLine run/walk followed by recovery and refueling at E+ROSE Rxmedy Room. All levels welcome. Free. 505 North Angier Ave NE, Suite 150 + 310, Atlanta. bit.ly/Courtney-Hanft-Sweat-092626.

Birds & Mental Wellness: A Reset For Fall – 10:30-11:30am. Explore how observing birds and connecting with nature can support mental wellness and provide a seasonal reset. Free. Wild Birds Unlimited of Macon, 5982 Zebulon Rd, Macon. bit.ly/Birds-Mental-Wellness-Fall-092626.

2nd Annual Cardiometabolic Health Fair – World Heart Day – Atlanta, GA 2026 – 11am-2pm. Learn, connect and take charge of heart and metabolic health with experts and activities. C.T. Martin Natatorium and Recreation Center, 3201 Martin Luther King Jr Dr SW. bit.ly/Cardiometabolic-Health-2026-092626.

Sunday, September 27

Vegan Food, Wellness Market & Services – 11am-5pm. Discover vegan food, wellness services, nutrition classes, health screenings, coaching, massages, juices, smoothies and community resources. Life Space Hope and Wellness, 294 Hamilton E Holmes Dr NW, Atlanta. bit.ly/Vegan-Food-Wellness-Market-092726.

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.

Thursday, October 1

Moves on the Green: Free Fitness Event – 5:30-6:30pm. October cardio dance class led by Dawn Peck with Zumba, Hip-Hop, Afrobeats, Reggae, Reggaeton and easy-to-follow choreography. All levels welcome. Free; registration required. Midtown Green, 98 14th St NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Moves-On-The-Green-100126.

Friday, October 2

Soul Sister Stretch – 6-7pm. Stretch together, connect with others and restore within yourself. Free; donations welcomed. Moving in the Spirit, 1458 La France St NE, Atlanta. bit.ly/Soul-Sister-Stretch-100226.

Saturday, October 3

Active Ashford – 9-10am. Complimentary outdoor fitness class hosted by Crunch Fitness, focused on movement, balance and community. Bring a yoga mat and water bottle. Free; RSVP required. Ashford Lane, 4500 Olde Perimeter Way, Atlanta. bit.ly/Active-Ashford-Fitness-100326.

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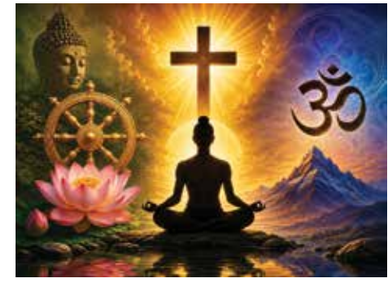
bit.ly/sacred-space-1003

FredrikaHealing.com

Sunday, October 4

"Man from Motown with a Message" – 11am-12pm and 1:30-3:00pm.Unity Atlanta Church welcomes Eddie Watkins, Jr., guest speaker and musician during the Sunday Service. Live concert at 1:30pm. Tickets $20. A former Motown bassist who performed with legendary artists, Eddie now shares spiritually uplifting music that inspires healing, connection, and personal transformation. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

ONGOING



SUNDAYS

Practicing the Presence - A Course in Miracles – 8:45-10:30am. 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, 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.

MONDAYS

Chair Yoga with Corina Genson - 12 -1 pm.All are invited to this gentle yoga class focusing on basic yoga poses, stretching and breathing exercise. Designed for all fitness levels, including beginners and those with physical limitations or injuries. Drop in for $20 or 5 classes for $75. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. UnityAtl.org.

TUESDAYS

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

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

Twin Hearts Meditation – 7-8:30pm. A short, guided meditation blessing the Earth with loving kindness, peace and good will. Donation. Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta, 3107 Clairmont Rd, Unit A, Atlanta. 404-417-0008. Meetup.com/Twin-Hearts-Meditation.

"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. 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 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.

Roswell Farmers Market Yoga – 9-10am. Start your weekend with a community outdoor yoga class. Meet behind City Hall at the War Memorial Bricks. Rain or shine. Roswell City Hall, 38 Hill Street, Roswell. @RoswellYoga.

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The Light of a Clear Blue Morning

by Amy Anderson

This past March, what I had spent most of my life bracing for finally arrived.

As I was getting into bed, the news came by phone: My mom had peacefully passed away. I'd known for months this was coming, but when the words landed, I was stunned.

When my father died in my youth, I deeply feared losing my mom, too. My father's death had taught me that life is short—he died suddenly in his late 50s, and we never got to say goodbye. My mother's death taught me that life is long; she died at age 98. Before her passing, we healed our relationship, and I made peace with letting her go. It didn't erase the loss, though.

I often heard, "You're so blessed to have had her for so long" and "She was blessed to have a long life." But in the raw flesh of my grief, I ached for more time with her. I saw that her long life required immense inner strength as she required full-time care. A better response might have been: "After having your mom for so long, I imagine this loss is profound."

The next morning, I drove several hours to my hometown, my throat tightening as I contemplated the day. Stepping into her room at the care facility, my eyes went straight to her empty recliner. She would always smile and say, "Hey, sweet girl!" Today, open boxes stood ready for her belongings. I eased into her chair and wept.

I held her clothes, seeking her smell. "Mama," I said, "Are you here? I miss you." I asked her for two birds as a sign, then waited by the window. Nothing came, so I returned to packing.

As my siblings carried boxes to their cars, I lingered, taking in the space one last time. The nursing-home smell we'd masked with cinnamon brooms, the holes in the wall from all the photos, the memories of all the visits we had with her. I imagined how long her days must have felt, the friendships she made, and how she passed the night before, right here, as my sister held her. A wave filled me with longing, regret, guilt, tremendous sadness, admiration and love. The range of emotions between a daughter and mother welled inside me. I broke down.

Then a cover of Dolly Parton's 1977 song, "Light of a Clear Morning," came to me clearly. Although I had never listened to it closely, it played in my head as if I'd memorized it.

"I can see the light of a clear blue morning / I can see the light of a brand new day / I can see the light of a clear blue morning / Oh, and everything's gonna be all right / It's gonna be okay."

I sensed my mother's essence soaring. Now, free from a room that was never quite home, free from her failing body, expansive and whole. A message settled over me: *"I'm okay, my love. Don't worry. Everything is going to be alright."*

In the parking lot, two large birds soared together above me for maybe a minute—black, wide-winged and white-tipped. Two birds. My sign.

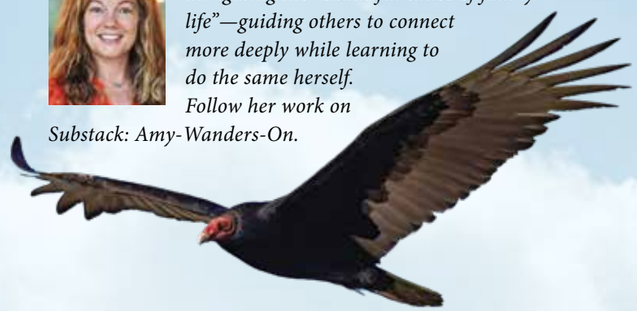
An internet search revealed the birds were turkey vultures. Not the majestic, noble bird I was hoping for! However, I learned that turkey vultures represent sacred transitions, rebirth, deep emotional healing, cleared negative energy and unseen support. Exactly what I needed.

Passing our childhood home on the way to the funeral, a turkey vulture flew close to my car. Another cruised overhead as I said goodbye to my family. Driving back to Atlanta, I saw more of them in the sky.

My mom still sends me signs. Her favorite shade of pink shows up. A cardinal when I'm thinking about her. Heart-shaped rocks or leaves along my path. She's present in a new way. I've realized our connections don't end with death.

I miss her fire, her smile, her hands, her voice. In the form I've known her, my mom is gone. It's an immense loss. When I sit with my grief, I hold to the message on that first day without her: Everything's gonna be alright. It's gonna be okay. ❧

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



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