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How some are shaking off a very bad, no-good year - Inner Banks

By Maggie Miles January 1, 2021 Publication: Virginian-Pilot, The (Norfolk, VA) Page: 15E Word Count: 1345

Well folks, 2020 was an eventful year. Between a global pandemic, social unrest, isolation, financial woes and a contentious presidential election, we really couldn't catch a break.

We asked locals to describe their year in one word: Agony, exhausting, dumpster fire, fail, awful, cray, nightmare, tumultuous, polarizing, awful. One person just wrote a bunch of symbols: #@*%/&!. Others wrote words like revealing, growth, eye-opening, enlightening, introspective, retrospective, game-changer and transformational.

Whether you'd describe your 2020 as a dumpster-fire or transformational, it's a safe bet we're all ready to turn the page. New Year's is a great time to pause, reflect, and give yourself some good, good lovin'. These local experts are showing us how.

Shree Fulcher, Ascension Studio: Try cacao ceremonies for renewal

"I believe that the whole 2020 experience has been about directing us toward our deepest

devotion, directing us back to what brings us joy and what lights us up, rather than doing what we feel we should be doing, or what makes us money, and instead being open to new possibilities. Cacao is a great way to restart."

Cacao - from which cocoa, cocoa butter and chocolate are made - is a huge heart opener, Fulcher says. On a physical level, it's a vasodilator: It improves the circulatory system and oxygenates blood. On a spiritual level, it opens our heart center, clearing the way for what's most important to us. You can do this in your home by making a cacao drink. High Vibe Holistic Co-op, located right beside Ascension at 1209 S. Croatan Hwy in Kill Devil Hills, has cacao and recipes.

Scott "Pickles" Lawler, Kind Yoga: Stay in the present moment

"I know its cliché, but it's so important. We're never in the moment. And when we're not in the moment, we're not in control because it's out of our hands. When you are in the present you are closest to your truest identity, and when you are true to yourself you're always going to be your best, and that's all (we), or anybody else, would ask of you."

Focusing on your breath is a great way to stay in the present moment, Lawler says. And you don't have to sit cross-legged in the dark with your eyes closed; you can do walking meditations or just sit for 5 minutes wherever you are. Quiet your mind and concentrate on simply breathing in and breathing out. Your other thoughts will still come, but visualize setting them gently on a leaf and sending them down the river - just let 'em go, he says.

Laura Martier, Martier Sound Meditation: Forgiveness and rest

"There's a lot of chaos and a lot of movement and things happening, and I really need to remind myself today to forgive myself for my actions within some of this chaos and forgive others as well. I truly want to cultivate peace and love in this world and at the same time I know I'm a human being and I make mistakes."

Martier says try a forgiveness prayer: "Please help all humanity throughout all time. Past, present and future all forgive each other, forgive ourselves. Be at peace with each other, be at peace with ourselves. Now and forever." Write out these words, or ones like them, and recite them to yourself while looking in the mirror, she says, or read it before you go to bed. If we (mess) up and get real with ourselves and love ourselves regardless, that's a big step toward tolerance and understanding of others, she says.

Martier is also an advocate for rest. Even with the pandemic she sees resistance to slowing down and an urgency to reach set goals. This could be the only time that it's mandatory to take a break, she says.

Amy Landes, Shine on Juicery: Let food be thy medicine

"Everyone wants to feel good. Food heals. Tuning into what medicine your body needs and using food as a form of medicine is a powerful practice. It is also a delicious one!"

Landes' favorite way to reset or cleanse is with a cold pressed juice flood. Giving her system a rest from digesting food while flooding her body with nutrients leaves her feeling clearer, lighter, brighter and more connected to her highest self.

She says drop the guilt for indulging over the holidays. Life is meant to be enjoyed. Know that you are powerful and can make positive choices for yourself today, she says.

Some other tips: Practice gratitude. Smile. Keep breathing. Focus on what you want, adding positive habits that you enjoy. Keep following the things that light you up, she says.

Jen Alexander, licensed clinical social worker: Reflect, and keep your eyes on the sunrise

"My advice for going forward is to both keep your eyes on the sunrise (the hope of the future) but to also stay focused on today. It can feel overwhelming to think of all that has changed. Notice it. Then bring your focus back to here and now. ... Our greatest growth often comes from our greatest upheaval. The beauty in that is that we can create a new foundation built on both what was working in the past and new patterns for what we want for the future."

Spend less time online and more time outside, Alexander says. Nature is grounding. It reminds us of the ebbs and flows of life and can be a calming peace when we connect to the simple yet profound moments happening right now.

She says make getting at least six hours of sleep a night a priority. Inadequate sleep makes us vulnerable mentally and physically. And while it may be difficult to spend time in person with people outside of your home, consider outdoor group exercise or volunteering with organizations that help others. A sense of contribution to our fellow human beings can improve our sense of connection to one another and our mental health, she says.

Michelle Lewis, Peace Garden Project and local pastor: Healing for the Black community

"Words don't adequately describe what it is to feel unsafe in the place where you live, or work, and/or serve. Sadly, the lack of safety is a reality for many. People are exhausted. Your Black and brown friends are exhausted. Allies are exhausted. I believe even the people that would never themselves personally utter Black Lives Matter are exhausted. It's exhausting and traumatizing to watch unarmed people gunned down in the streets. It's exhausting to watch people who are legally armed gunned down in their neighborhoods, or on the front porch of their grandparent's homes. As a former law enforcement officer, I am exhausted."

For everyone, healing is going to look a little different, Lewis says. She's found healing in the gardens over the last year as well as through walks on the beach and conversation with friends who share similar beliefs. She's found healing through prayer and meditation. Lewis encourages people to find a practice and make it part of a daily routine. There are people out there who want to help with the healing work, she says, but the first step is recognizing that healing needs to happen in the first place.

Lewis says she knows her Black life matters, and it's not something she needs to prove to others. But you have the right to remove yourself from situations or organizations where you don't feel welcome or valued, she says, noting she had to do it recently herself. But if you stay, she says, find allies - surround yourself with people whom you know care about your life, and value your personhood. Allies don't just show up when it's popular but every day, she says.

Lewis notes that Black and brown people don't get to shed their skin when it's inconvenient. The community's cries of Black Lives Matter carries with it the hope that others will begin to love and value them in the ways that they love and value others and are learning to love and value themselves.

Scott "Pickles" Lawler of Kind Yoga. Shree Fulcher of Ascension Studio in Kill Devil Hills.
Laura Martier of Martier Sound Meditation. Jen Alexander, licensed clinical social worker.

Michelle Lewis of Peace Garden Project in Manteo and local pastor. Amy Landes of Shine on Juicery. Courtesy photo Courtesy photo Courtesy photo courtesy photo File photo courtesy photo

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