

unity



Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

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Breathing new life into meditation

The precise date of meditation's origin is uncertain, but there's consensus among archaeologists and scholars that it's been around for 5,000 years. The earliest records of the practice derived from religious texts, also known as the Vedas, in ancient India. By the early 20th century, meditation and the practice of yoga had spread to the United States.

Today, meditation and the related practice of "mindfulness" are ingrained in our culture. Americans are immersing themselves in several novel aspects of these two pursuits of mellowness and an elevated state of consciousness.

Those who want to quiet their minds are no longer limited to doing so alone or in small groups. In New York and Los Angeles, for example, sizable numbers are gathering for "sound baths." People convene to focus on the vibrations of tuning forks and singing bowls. Helen Lavretsky, a psychiatry professor at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at the Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA, told The New York Times that participants will often experience "deep mental and physical relaxation" that would "increase the parasympathetic autonomic nervous system tone" and decrease the stress response.

Recently, 800 people meditated in an auditorium in New York City, and mega-gatherings are being held outdoors in places such as Central Park.



Mass meditation gatherings are being held in places such as Central Park.



In New York and Los Angeles, people gather for "sound baths," during which participants focus on the vibrations of singing bowls.

Another approach to lessening stress through meditation comes in the form of salt therapy and salt yoga. Practitioners sit and breathe in the pure salt pumped into the room via a halogenerator. Breathe Salt Rooms (www.breatheeasyusa.com) is the first such venue in New York for the yoga version of this therapy. Its salt room is covered in 6 inches of Himalayan rock salt, with walls made of rock salt bricks and lit with salt crystal lamps. Once a week, the room is converted into a yoga studio with a practice that focuses on breathing.

Salt therapy has long been used around the world (including in the U.S.) to boost the immune system, ease allergies, improve skin conditions and combat stubborn colds. That's possible due to salt's antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal and anti-inflammatory properties.

Those who'd rather meditate on a digital level are in luck. There's a hugely popular app for that. It's called Headspace (www.headspace.com). Creator Andy Puddicombe, a British meditation teacher, trained as a Tibetan Buddhist monk before creating the iPhone app, which consists of 350 hours' worth of guided meditation lessons. Headspace (which has competitors in the market) has garnered millions of users including Richard Branson, who put the company's meditation exercises on Virgin Airlines flights, and the Seattle Seahawks.

Clearly, those who choose to meditate in solitude or en masse are breathing new life into the ancient practice.

Assisted living meets Asian heritage



More Asians are taking up residence in assisted living communities in the U.S.

About two decades ago, assisted living options for Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders were almost unheard of. The overriding factor, according to experts, was the Asian community's cultural beliefs about caring for the elderly. In 2014, an AARP study found that almost 75 percent of Asians believe they should be doing, or should have done, more for their parents, compared with 48 percent of the general public. For younger generations, filial piety – or respect for one's elders – required them to house and care for their parents.

Now, the growth of a culturally specific sector of the housing industry for senior Asians is emerging as attitudes among Asian immigrant families about elder care evolve, and the number of Asians who are senior citizens rises.

According to the Administration on Aging, a division of the Health and Human Services Department, the number of Asian, Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders over age 65 is expected to grow to 2.5 million by 2020 and 7.6 million by 2050, from fewer than 1 million in 2000.

The Pew Research Center says Asian-Americans are the fastest-growing racial group in the U.S. Perhaps it's no surprise that the Pacific Northwest, home to a large Asian community, is a leader in the growth of the Asian-specific assisted living community.

Two Washington providers are prime examples of this targeted housing sector. Kin On (www.kinon.org), based in Seattle, bills itself as the nation's first Chinese nursing home operated by the Chinese community. Aegis Living, based in Redmond, is an assisted living provider that owns two Chinese senior housing properties called Aegis Gardens



Asian assisted living communities focus on cultural aspects such as feng-shui interiors and activities that include mahjong.

(www.aegisliving.com/aegis/asian-communities) in Fremont, California and Newcastle, Washington.

A primary difference between traditional senior housing and Asian senior living communities is cultural care. Asian assisted living communities focus on cultural aspects of care reflecting traditional family values and beliefs, such as:

- Feng-shui architecture and building interiors
- Cultural design including Chinese gold coins, guardian lions and the absence of the number four, which is considered unlucky
- Activities such as calligraphy, mahjong and tai chi
- Traditional dishes such as porridge, soup and noodles, fish, rice and steamed vegetables, chawan mushi and oyako donburi
- Caregivers and staffers fluent in English and Chinese

Assisted living provider Aegis Living is trying to keep up with the demand for more Asian-inspired housing for the elderly. In 2015, the company broke ground on a \$50 million community in Washington's Puget Sound that's expected to open in 2017.

The community will include an outdoor amphitheater, swimming pool, spa, tea rooms, private dining rooms with cooking facilities for celebrations and receptions, a children's preschool, a Zen garden, a ping-pong area, an herbal pharmacy and a setting for weddings.

Aegis Living CEO Dwayne Clark told the Puget Sound Business Journal that there's "an explosion of elderly in King County, many of them Asian-Americans. We need the full range of facilities and more (living) units, and this luxury center helps meet that need."

Personal – and poignant – exploration

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The three artists featured in this issue of *Unity* draw from their individual sense of culture, history and design.

MALU TAN

Malu Tan, a resident of Wilton, Connecticut, was born into a family of industrialists in Manila, Philippines. She graduated with bachelor's degrees in business management and Asian art history from De La Salle University in Manila. It was when she and her family relocated, and she obtained a degree in painting from The Art Academy of London, that she pursued her childhood dream of becoming a full-time artist.

Tan says she paints intuitively, blocking off patches of color, and then blending images into each other. "Cherry Pink Blossoms," which features textured pinks and yellows and a closely cropped display of the sky, trees and field, is a prime example of this technique. "Simplicity of horizontal bands juxtaposed with vibrant color" is Tan's description of "Gentle Breeze." Both works are a part of her Colorspace series, which offers a sense of place that is both familiar and new.



"Cherry Pink Blossoms" by Malu Tan

"Speeding Along," with its muted shades of blues and greens, portrays the curves and bends of the Taconic Parkway, New York, with the Hudson Valley's lush trees behind it.

"I am inspired by the natural world and the process of painting," says Tan. "My intention is to encourage the viewer to look at my work with a degree of discovery, contemplation and entrancement."



"Gentle Breeze" by Malu Tan



"Speeding Along" by Malu Tan

ANNYSA NG

Annysa Ng was born and raised in British-ruled Hong Kong and remembers being fond of drawing and painting at a young age. She studied fine art at Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design in Germany and the School of Visual Arts in New York.



"Face" by Annysa Ng



"Predestination Randomness" by Annysa Ng

Ng says Tang dynasty poems, Chinese literature, bedside/mythical stories and Great Britain impact her works of ink and acrylics. Her work often demonstrates a unique interaction between history and literature and technical expertise and visual aesthetics. Ng's intricate ink drawings of Elizabethan collars, as in "Face," are rendered in a precise way; the dots she forms are extremely subtle and delicate. Her featureless faces void of expression and color provide viewers with a portrait to which they can assign emotion and identity. The black-with-white contrast lines speak of Ng's mixed European and Asian background.

"Constrained Beauty," which combines period Elizabethan ruffled collars with a traditional Chinese costume, is a work of ink and acrylic on silk. "The work does not merely illustrate a combination of cultures in Hong Kong but specifies the paradox of a void identity," she says.



In "Predestined Randomness," the eight-armed figure poses a question about fate. One hand holds the distaff and spindle of Moirai (the goddesses of fate) while the others gesture as if playing rock-paper-scissors, a children's game of probabilities and uncertainty.

Ng, who lives in Manhattan, has received several fellowships and residencies in New York City and the Czech Republic. Her work has appeared in exhibits in New York, London, Beijing and Hong Kong.

"Constrained Beauty" by Annysa Ng

TONY YIN TAK CHU

Tony Yin Tak Chu was born in China, raised in Hong Kong and moved to Canada in 1996. Chu says impressionism was his early influence; eventually, his primary influence shifted to his roots and his past. After graduating from the visual-arts program at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada, Chu continued his education with art history courses at the University of British Columbia.

"Since graduating from Emily Carr," Chu says, "my work has revolved around my cultural identity as a Chinese immigrant in Canada." Chu uses water-based mediums, yet occasionally makes his own paint from everyday items, and works on hard and flat surfaces.

In order to break down cultural barriers and to maintain his cultural identity in a multicultural society, Chu says his mixed-media pieces, "Mountains and Rivers 4" and "Mountains and Rivers 9," represent the present and the past. "The ancient intellectuals regarded the idea of beautiful mountains and rivers as the harmonized society," says Chu. His use of white appears as billows of clouds peacefully surrounding the other images in these two works.

"These works relate to the idea of a humble life. Influences of West and East can be found in my work," says Chu, "but the Chinese influence is more dominant" as seen in "Spring 2," which he describes as depicting everyday life.

"My work has multiple viewpoints of Asian tradition that were used in ancient paintings. The way I paint has definitely been influenced by Chinese calligraphy, which I learned in my teens," says Chu, who now lives in Richmond, British Columbia, Canada. Chu has also done public installations in Vancouver.



"Mountains and Rivers 4" by Tony Yin Tak Chu



"Mountains and Rivers 9" by Tony Yin Tak Chu



"Spring 2" by Tony Yin Tak Chu

Well-seasoned master of sushi



Chef Michael "Sushi Mike" Ni prepares sushi for about 100 diners at lunchtime.

Michael Ni, born in the South China province of Fujian, wasn't always a chef. His first career was in the field of mechanical engineering. It wasn't until he left China in 1995 and settled in the United States that he trained to become a sushi chef.

Ni worked for several Japanese sushi restaurants in New York and New Jersey before joining Eurest Dining/Compass Food Service in 2004, where he's furthered his skills as a sushi chef. The Philadelphia resident travels frequently, making appearances as a guest chef for many of Eurest's business dining accounts.

Unity spoke to Ni – known as "Sushi Mike" – about life before and after moving to the U.S. His responses have been edited for clarity.

Q. Describe the work you did in China. How many engineering firms did you work for?

A. When I was in China, I helped firms take care of mechanical equipment. I worked for two mechanical engineering firms for eight years.

Q. Why did you leave the field of engineering and become a sushi chef?

A. In America, English was a large barrier for me, so I desired to become a sushi chef.

Q. How difficult or easy was it for you to make this career change?

A. It was really difficult for me; it took me about three years of training before I could work as a regular sushi chef.



Spicy tuna rolls are Chef Michael Ni's favorite because of the variety of flavors.

Q. Have you earned specific certification as a sushi chef?

A. I don't have a specific certification, but I was taught by Yujay Kumagawa, a well-trained Japanese sushi chef. He was trained in Japan.

Q. Approximately how much sushi do you prepare daily? Does anyone else help prepare the sushi?

A. I am the only one who prepares the sushi. Usually I take care of at least a hundred people daily at lunchtime. I have taken care of a thousand people at a firm's party.

Q. What is your favorite type of sushi to eat, and why?

A. I like spicy tuna the best because there are so many different kinds of flavors.

Q. Are you famous for making a certain type of sushi dish?

A. Yes. Spicy Tuna, Crunchy Spicy Tuna, Pepper Tuna and Tuna Tataki.



Gluten-free goodness

Can't imagine life without General Tso's Chicken and lo mein noodles? What about moo shu pancakes and wonton soup? You can if you have gluten sensitivity or celiac disease.

An autoimmune disorder that can occur in people with a genetic predisposition (possessing tissue transglutaminase, or tTG, antibodies), celiac disease is triggered by a protein called gluten, which is in wheat, barley and rye. When people with celiac disease eat foods containing gluten, their immune systems respond by damaging their small intestine.

Those with gluten sensitivity can endure abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea and/or constipation when they consume gluten. Unlike celiac patients, people who are sensitive to gluten don't suffer intestinal damage or have tTG antibodies.

Two-and-a-half million Americans are believed to be undiagnosed sufferers of celiac disease, which can lead to serious health problems. Reportedly, one out of 236 Asians develops celiac disease. In 2013, researchers at Nanchang University determined the disease was more common than had been reported in China.

The only option for those with celiac disease and gluten sensitivity is a gluten-free diet. Yet, even if they avoid flour-based dishes, most Asian restaurant diners are almost guaranteed to be eating gluten. For example, all Chinese condiments – including traditional soy, oyster, hoisin and bean sauces – contain wheat.

So what choices do “wheatless” lovers of Asian food have?

- **Meals prepared at home.** You can cook gastro-friendly dishes such as Thai Chicken Curry. If cooking doesn't appeal to you, buy gluten-free frozen entrees and sides made by companies such as Feel Good Foods (<http://feel-good-foods.com>).
- **Gluten-free restaurant meals.** You might have noticed that restaurant chains such as PF Chang's serve gluten-free dishes. Chang's says its gluten-free dishes are cooked with chicken broth, oyster sauce, rice wine, sugar, water, and/or wheat free soy sauce and white pepper. Its cornstarch-based marinades are gluten free. Of course, steamed-vegetable menu options have always been a safe option for the non-gluten dinner.



Thai-Style Green Curry

- 1 cup jasmine rice
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 baby eggplants, halved lengthways, cut into 3/4-inch pieces
- 1 to 2 tablespoons Thai green curry paste, to taste
- 8 ounces green beans, stems removed, halved crosswise
- 2 carrots, sliced into bite-sized pieces
- 1/2 cup frozen peas
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 bell pepper, de-seeded and sliced into bite-sized pieces
- 1 can (14 1/2 ounces) coconut milk
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 4 kaffir lime leaves, roughly torn
- 1 cup torn fresh basil leaves
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice (from 1 lime)
- 1/2 cup baby corn
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 2 teaspoons grated palm sugar, or regular sugar
- 1/4 cup cilantro (as garnish)

Prepare the rice.

Heat the oil in a wok or deep frying pan over high heat.

Add the eggplant and stir-fry for 3-4 minutes until golden. Set the eggplant aside.

Add the paste to the wok and stir briefly.

Add the green beans, carrots, peas, onion and bell pepper, and stir-fry, tossing 1-2 minutes until lightly seared.

Add the coconut milk, chicken stock, lime leaves and corn and bring to a boil.

Return the eggplant to the pan, and then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes until the corn is just tender.

Stir in the fish sauce, lime juice and sugar and heat for 1 minute.

Garnish with cilantro, if desired, and serve over rice or rice noodles.

Recipe courtesy of celiac.com

Only 12, but already a key player



Joey Alexander's fans include jazz greats Herbie Hancock and Wynton Marsalis.

Do you know who won the 2016 Best Jazz Instrumental Album and Best Improvised Jazz Solo awards during the 58th annual Grammy Awards presentation? Probably not.

But it's a sure bet that if Joey Alexander had won, you'd know. His deft piano playing at the Grammys earned him a standing ovation. The sixth-youngest – and diminutive – Grammy nominee has been overshadowing many of his accomplished peers for years. That's no easy feat for a typical 12-year-old. Joey, as you might know or have surmised, is anything but typical.

Born in Bali, Josiah Alexander Sila (aka, Joey Alexander) owes his love of jazz to his father, Denny Sila, and his collection of jazz standards. Once Joey taught himself to play the piano by ear at age 6, Denny Sila took him to sessions where he jammed with musicians at least double his age. Those local influences – plus jazz masters John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Bill Evans and Wynton Marsalis – further bolstered his passion and skill.

Two years after teaching himself to play piano, 8-year-old Joey performed in front of an enthusiastic Herbie Hancock while the jazz elder

was in Jakarta. Joey was just a year older when he won the Ukraine's first Master-Jam Fest, an all-ages competition. By the time he performed at galas in New York City for Jazz at Lincoln Center in 2014, he had gained the rapt attention of jazz lovers worldwide. Performances posted on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP9GKAbvDxLBqCcEaw4HDiw>) also helped broaden his fan base.

In May 2015, Joey – who's now living in New York City – released his debut album, "My Favorite Things" featuring his renditions of ballads, blues and standards by the likes of Coltrane and Rodgers and Hammerstein. Veteran jazz musicians and upstarts from NYC accompanied Joey on the album.

Joey has called his talent a gift from God, which he hones during daily practice sessions and numerous tours (he's home-schooled, by the way). The youngest person to ever perform at the famed Newport Jazz Festival – a gig many artists work a lifetime to get – Joey has the ear of people throughout the music industry. Downbeat magazine and The New York Times have praised his poise and precision. But perhaps the greatest accolade came from Wynton Marsalis during a 2016 profile of Joey on CBS' "60 Minutes."

Asked to assess Joey, Marsalis simply said, "I've never heard anyone who can play like him."

For more information about Joey and his live appearances – including a May 5 performance at St. Lucia Jazz Festival 2016, visit <http://joeyalexandermusic.com>.

Born in Bali, Joey Alexander owes his love of jazz to his father.