

WAITING IN THE WINGS: the real you

Personal change that lasts requires a secret ingredient: You getting to know you. Wellness activist Haile Thomas explains how to look inside yourself—and enjoy the view.

words | MITRA MALEK

Last year was tumultuous—a day-to-day reckoning with many unknowns. If you feel lost as the new year begins, unsure of what goals to set, don't despair. Confusion can be a necessary precursor to becoming more authentic versions of ourselves, and abiding by our true selves is what we *really* need when it comes to goal-setting.

Haile Thomas reminds herself of this regularly. Not long ago, the young entrepreneur and health activist felt overwhelmed and stressed. Barely an adult but already earning accolades befitting one, she struggled to balance her work with her well-being.

“I had reached a breaking point and decided I needed to figure out how I could best take care of myself,” says Thomas, 20. She started journaling, which at first felt foreign but eventually yielded comfort. “I’ve always been very curious about the world. I’m used to asking questions. But in terms of directing that toward myself, that has been something new.”

Now, she’s inspiring others to ask probing questions of themselves as a tool for achieving lasting change and true wellness. ➡





PHOTO | TENEAL McNAIR

TAKE AN INNER INTERVIEW

The best way to set your goals for 2021 is by listening to your inner voice. Otherwise, you'll backtrack or feel frustrated. Thomas asks herself key questions every month in order to recalibrate and feel tuned in to herself. Below are five of her favorites and why they matter.

WHAT EMOTIONS AM I EXPERIENCING RIGHT NOW?

Why it works: It forces you to be engaged in the present moment.

HOW CAN I HONOR THOSE EMOTIONS INSTEAD OF RESISTING OR AVOIDING THEM?

Why it works: It allows you to accept and process your emotions fully.

HOW CAN I BECOME MY OWN SAFE SPACE?

Why it works: It teaches you to provide for yourself that which you might seek outside of yourself.

WHAT INNER EVOLUTION, BIG OR SMALL, CAN I CELEBRATE?

Why it works: Celebrating personal wins of all kinds creates self-compassion.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN I TAKE TO PROTECT MY ENERGY AND USE IT INTENTIONALLY?

Why it works: It reminds you that your wellness is within your power.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Thomas and her work—which started before she was in double digits—defy a single title. Ask her, and she'll say she's a wellness and compassion activist. Also: a speaker and the CEO of HAPPY, the nonprofit organization she built to inspire young people to holistically take care of themselves and the world (HAPPY is an acronym for Healthy, Active, Positive, Purposeful Youth).

A few years ago, she enrolled in the Institute for Integrative Nutrition's health coaching program; at age 16, she became the program's youngest graduate. At age 12, she created a winning dish for the first White House Kids' State Dinner. At age nine, she started her own YouTube show, *Kids Can Cook*. That summary isn't exhaustive, but her endeavors are "all interconnected," Thomas says.

Everything started with food. When she was just five, Thomas, whose parents are from Jamaica, sidled up to her mother at the stove. A few years later, after her father was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and prescribed medication with a terrifying list of potential side effects, her mother researched alternatives, and family meals transformed from being heavy on white rice and meat to spotlighting veggies.

"We were all watching food documentaries together and remixing our recipes," says Thomas, who lives with her parents and younger sister in New York's Hudson Valley. "We were able to completely reverse his condition."

Her health quest continued. "I randomly came across this article about red meat causing cancer," Thomas says. It stuck with her. She'd heard about veganism and decided to give it a shot for six months. Her parents and sister joined. Thomas was 13. They've all been vegan since.

Last year, Thomas's lifelong love of food culminated in her authoring *Living Lively*, a collection of 80 plant-based recipes* ... and a whole lot more.



PHOTO | TENNEAL MCNAIR

SELF-CARE, REDEFINED

Like Thomas, *Living Lively* defies categorization. Thomas calls it an "empowerment cookbook": half loving instructions for self-growth, achieved through contemplation and journal-like entries, and half recipes and strategies that speak to cooks, novice through expert.

"*Living Lively* is rooted in this idea of being self-reflective and really diving into the elements that shape us," Thomas says. "It's so important because we can kind of operate within society, in our own lives, on autopilot, where we're just absorbing whatever is happening, continuing to react in the ways that we have been conditioned to react or are comfortable with, and not really questioning why certain things trigger certain emotions or reactions."

Thomas describes journaling and self-inquiry as "the core and staple part" of her wellness routine.

"In many ways, that has been my introduction to almost a deeper element of self-care—beyond my plate, beyond face masks and things like that," she says. "I think there's this deeper awareness ... and this mindfulness that emerges too. It's where you're keeping track of yourself, your progress, your mental states, your ideas and emotions, and watching this flowering, in a way, of different versions of you over time. It's a cool experience, but also a way to really hold ourselves accountable to actively become who we believe we are and who we can be, every single day." ➡

✪ Mitra Malek is former *Yoga Journal* editor and longtime hard-news reporter whose work has appeared in *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*. Connect with her on Twitter (@MitraMalek) or at mitramalek.com.

*Head to p. 54 to try a couple of recipes from *Living Lively*!



PHOTO | ALEXSEY REYES

DEFINE YOUR OWN SUCCESS

Pursuing your self-to-be can be daunting—but it's also exciting. There's a new you waiting, and you've got sole custody over how you turn out. Being deliberate about your evolution engenders the stick-to-it-iveness that lasting change demands. It also creates space for you to become self-aware, Thomas notes. Drawing from what she calls your "7 Points of Power" in *Living Lively*, here's how Thomas suggests going after your goals in 2021.

WEEK 1: LAUNCHPAD

Take, and then review, your inner interview (see p. 50). You might discover that conducting your inner interview many times (use that journal!) reveals your clearest desires for the new year. Hunt for clues. Your responses will inform the following seven aspects of your life, one for each of the next seven weeks: wellness, mindset, relationships with others, societal influence, education, world perspective, and creativity.

My goals for 2021: _____

WEEK 2: WELLNESS

No matter your goal, wellness should play a role. There are many types of wellness, including physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, intellectual, environmental, and social. Define what wellness means to you, and throughout the week, notice which type or types of wellness your goals connect with.

What wellness means to me: _____

WEEK 3: MINDSET

Your goals will be much more achievable if you're on your own side. But mindset is probably the toughest aspect of our lives to get a handle on, and our thoughts affect everything we do. Good news: There are tools that help. This week, create one positive affirmation about yourself each day (and yes, they can relate to your goals).

Monday affirmation: _____

Tuesday affirmation: _____

Wednesday affirmation: _____

Thursday affirmation: _____

Friday affirmation: _____

Saturday affirmation: _____

Sunday affirmation: _____

WEEK 4: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

Your relationships nourish or zap you. That, in turn, affects whether you're able to reach your goals. Define a healthy relationship. Then use the week to observe how you feel when interacting with key people in your life. You'll notice certain dynamics are good for you while others aren't. Steer yourself toward those that are good for you. (Shifting relationships could require more than one week, but—yay for you!—you've taken the first step.)

A healthy relationship is ... _____

WEEK 5: SOCIETAL INFLUENCE

Outside influence plays as big a role as you let it. If you look at magazines, read the news, or use social media, it affects you (and your goals), so managing the onslaught is important. This week, consider whether the media you consume is good for you or toxic for you, and then take a step or two to tip the scales for the better.

Media I consumed this week	Should I consume more or less of it?

WEEK 6: EDUCATION

Find one thing you can learn to get you closer to your goals, and then spend some time on it.

My education plan: _____

WEEK 7: WORLD PERSPECTIVE

How you view the world affects how you interact with it, and that can be holding you back or propelling you toward your goals. This week, make an effort to connect with someone who is different from you, and then consider what you learned from your interactions.

What I learned: _____

WEEK 8: CREATIVITY

Creativity makes us powerful, and everyone is creative in some way. So have fun this week: Come up with one creative thing you can do to help you meet your goals. And then do it!

How I'll create: _____



Boldly better-for-you treats

from *Living Lively*

FEEL BETTER BERRY BARS

MAKES 12 BARS

recipe / HAILE THOMAS

If you're feeling a little stressed or anxious, treat yourself to these soothing and delicious bars. There are three main ingredients that contribute to its calming properties: Brazil nuts, which are high in selenium, can help improve mood; potassium-rich pumpkin seeds can reduce stress; and antioxidant-packed blueberries can help provide anxiety relief.

INGREDIENTS

NUT AND SEED BASE

- 1 cup raw almonds
- 1/2 cup raw Brazil nuts
- 1/2 cup raw pumpkin seeds
- 1/2 cup unsweetened shredded coconut
- 2 Tbsp maca powder
- 1 cup golden raisins
- 2 Tbsp sunflower seed butter
- 2 Tbsp unsweetened oat milk, plus extra

BERRY-BEET TOP LAYER

- 2 cups frozen blueberries
- 1 Tbsp beet powder
- 2 to 3 Tbsp pure maple syrup, to taste
- 2 Tbsp coconut oil, melted
- 1/2 cup unsweetened finely shredded coconut
- 1/4 cup chia seeds
- 1 Tbsp sunflower seed butter
- 1/2 cup raw cashews, soaked in hot water for at least 10 minutes
- 1/4 cup unsweetened oat milk
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract

STEPS

1. Line bottom and sides of 9 × 9 inch baking pan with parchment paper.
2. **Make the nut and seed base:** In food processor, combine almonds, Brazil nuts, pumpkin seeds, coconut, maca powder, raisins, sunflower seed butter, and 2 Tbsp oat milk and blend until crumbly and sticky. If mixture is a bit dry and doesn't stick to itself, add more oat milk, 1 Tbsp at a time, and blend.
3. Pour mixture into prepared baking pan and press into even layer across bottom. Freeze while you make the top layer!
4. **Make the berry-beet top layer:** In food processor, combine blueberries, beet powder, maple syrup, coconut oil, coconut, chia seeds, sunflower seed butter, drained cashews, oat milk, and vanilla and blend until smooth and thick.
5. Remove pan from freezer and pour berry-beet layer over nut and seed base. Smooth across surface with spatula. Freeze for 30 minutes to 1 hour, until set.
6. Remove from freezer and, if desired, top with coconut shreds, pumpkin seeds, and almond slivers. Slice into 12 bars and enjoy! You can store bars in fridge for 3 days or freezer for up to 1 month.

IN EACH DELICIOUS BAR (WITHOUT OPTIONAL TOPPING): 408 CALORIES / 9 g PROTEIN / 28 g FAT / 32 g CARBS (14 g SUGAR, 10 g FIBER) / 18 mg SODIUM



PHOTO: HAILE THOMAS AND WILL COLEMAN

OPTIONAL TOPPINGS

- Unsweetened shredded coconut
- Raw pumpkin seeds
- Raw slivered almonds

CASHEW “CHEESECAKE” SQUARES

MAKES ABOUT 12 SQUARES

recipe / HAILE THOMAS

For as long as I can remember, cheesecake has been my most favorite dessert ever. So, when I decided to go vegan, one of the first things I wanted to experiment with was a dairy-free cheesecake. I've tried using tofu, plant-based cream cheese, and other interesting ingredients . . . but a cashew base is just perfectly rich and creamy. These squares are filled with delicious nostalgia and could definitely compete with your traditional cheesecake.

INGREDIENTS

CRUST

- 1/2 cup raw almonds (or nut of your choice, such as cashews or peanuts)
- 3/4 cup rolled oats (gluten free if desired)
- 1 cup pitted Medjool or Deglet Noor dates
- 1/2 cup fresh blueberries or diced fruit of your choice (such as raspberries, blackberries, or strawberries)
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground cardamom

“CHEESECAKE” BATTER

- 1 1/2 cups raw cashews, covered in water and soaked overnight in fridge
- 1/2 cup full-fat coconut milk
- 1/3 cup pure maple syrup
- 3 Tbsp coconut oil, melted and cooled
- 2 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp grated orange zest
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 1/4 tsp Himalayan pink salt

OPTIONAL BLUE/PINK/LAVENDER SWIRL

- 1 1/2 tsp colored powder: Butterfly pea flower powder (for blue) or pitaya or beet powder (for pink)

STEPS

1. Line bottom and all sides of 9 × 9 inch baking pan with parchment paper (or use a springform pan).
2. **Make the crust:** In food processor, pulse together almonds, oats, dates, blueberries, cinnamon, and cardamom until well incorporated. The mixture should be thick and stick together when pressed.
3. Evenly press crust over bottom of lined pan. Freeze for 20 minutes.
4. **Make the batter:** Drain cashews and transfer to large high-powered blender (see “Need for speed”). Add coconut milk, maple syrup, coconut oil, lemon juice, orange zest, vanilla, and salt and blend until smooth and creamy.
5. If you want your cheesecake squares to have swirls, set aside most of cheesecake batter in large bowl, leaving 1/4 cup in blender. Add butterfly pea flower powder, pitaya powder, or beet powder to blender and blend until smooth. Transfer colored batter to small bowl.
6. Remove prepared crust from freezer and pour cheesecake batter over crust, spreading evenly. To add swirls, drop small dollops of colored batter across top of cheesecake and swirl them with toothpick or chopstick.
7. Freeze cheesecake for at least 6 hours and up to overnight.
8. Let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes before serving.

IN EACH DELICIOUS SQUARE: 261 CALORIES / 5 g PROTEIN / 14 g FAT / 32 g CARBS (20 g SUGAR, 3 g FIBER) / 13 mg SODIUM ⓐ



NEED FOR SPEED

For this recipe, you'll need to use a high-powered blender to ensure the cashews can be fully broken down and blended to achieve the creamiest possible “cheesecake” consistency.

PHOTO | HAILE THOMAS AND WILL COLEMAN

Note: You'll want to plan ahead for this recipe! The cashews need to soak overnight before you make the cheesecake, and then the cheesecake needs to be frozen for 6 hours to overnight. It will be worth it!



ⓐ Haile Thomas is a 20-year-old international speaker, wellness and compassion activist, and content creator. @hailethomas; hailevthomas.com

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