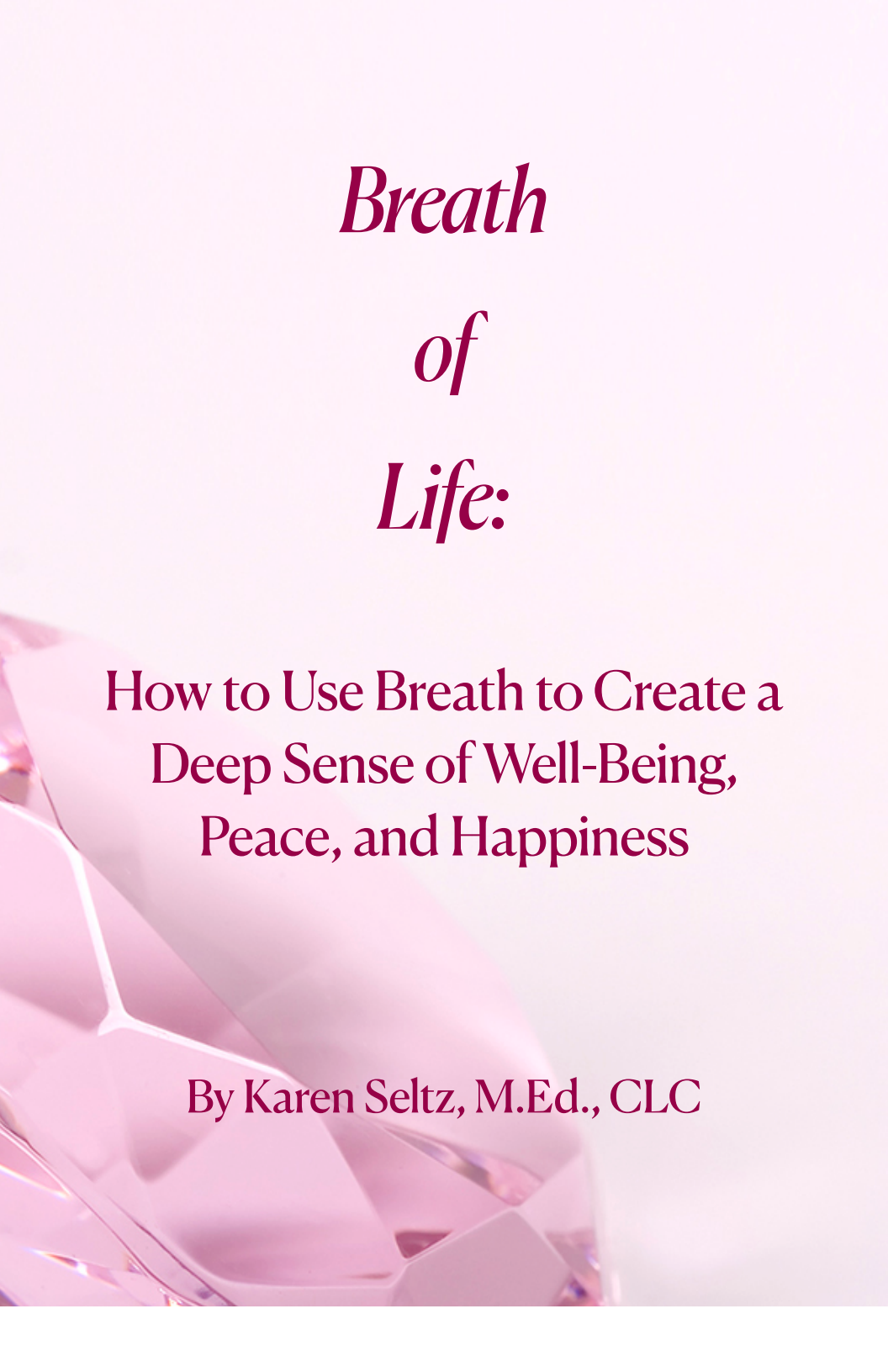


A close-up photograph of a large, faceted pink diamond, which serves as the background for the entire page. The diamond's facets are clearly visible, reflecting light in various shades of pink and white.

Breath of Life:

How to Use Breath to Create a
Deep Sense of Well-Being,
Peace, and Happiness

By Karen Seltz, M.Ed., CLC

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Breath of Life:

How to Quickly Improve Clarity,
Focus, and Energy While
Creating a Deep Sense of Well-
Being, Peace, and Happiness

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Introduction

I'll never forget the sheer terror I felt when I arrived at the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) to see my ten-day old, premature infant surrounded by a team of doctors and nurses rushing about trying to save her life. I was shown to a chair as I sat and watched helplessly. I held my breath and prayed.

I remember thinking to myself, "I can't handle this! You aren't supposed to give us more than we can handle, God. Please don't take my baby! Please, please, please don't take my baby!" Tears were streaming down my face, my body was shaking, and I was NOT breathing... at least not much.

After what seemed like an eternity, the immediate danger was over. However, my body did not get the memo. Unfortunately, this occurred before I had a formal meditation and breathing practice. It took over an hour for my heart rate and blood pressure to stabilize, for my body to stop shaking, and for me to finally take that deep breath and to utter that sigh of relief.

My daughter had experienced what's is called an SVT (SupraVentricular Tachycardia), a very rapid heartbeat (>200 beats per minute) that doesn't go down using conventional methods. Thankfully, they gave her a

shot of something that calmed it down. (Where was my shot? 😊)

My intention for writing this ebook is to offer you some practical tools to utilize daily so that **when**, not if, stress arises, you will automatically know what to do without giving it a second thought. Calm will be your new HABIT! This will serve you in so many ways.

Many of us are under the false impression that we perform better under pressure. This is simply NOT TRUE! In fact, it is physiologically impossible. Stress of any kind causes the body's sympathetic nervous system to be activated. The heart, respiratory rates, and blood pressure all shoot up. Blood is sent to the limbs in preparation for action (fight or flight). This causes blood to be taken away from the decision-making center of the brain and other non-vital (at least to survival) processes of the body such as digestion.

When stress becomes chronic, it can lead to mood and anxiety disorders and depression.

Incorporating the breathing techniques I'm about to share with you can minimize the effects of stress on your body and mind, leading to more happiness and peace and better mental and physical health. I also wish to inspire you to begin (or continue) a daily, lifelong practice of mindfulness that includes breathing

and meditation. The benefits are innumerable and you are worth it!

We all know that breathing is an essential function for survival but, did you know that the way one breathes has a direct correlation to how she *feels* and how much personal power she experiences?

When dealing with challenging or stressful situations, our bodies have an unconscious tendency to pull the diaphragm in. This is the area of the solar plexus where the body stores all of its emotions. If you find yourself feeling powerless, you can simply observe your breathing patterns. Are you holding your breath? Are the breaths shallow and up in the chest?

You may also wish to notice what is happening in the rest of the body. Are you experiencing a rapid heart beat or heart palpitations, dizziness, sweaty palms, muscle tightness or spasms, pain, nausea, changes in your vision...? What is present for you?

What emotions are you feeling? Are you allowing them and welcoming them in or trying to push them away by staying busy, oversleeping, binge watching Netflix, or engaging in some addictive behavior?

What I have found is that the emotions I feel are either based on triggers from difficult/disturbing past events

(or even traumas) or are stories I am telling myself about what is occurring now or will occur in the future.

I have found [Byron Katie's "The Work"](#) to be very helpful in interrupting this pattern (of thoughts and emotions caused by my internal stories) by questioning those stories and ultimately discrediting their validity.

Once you become aware of what is happening within the mind and body, you are consciously able to choose another, more supporting way of breathing. I invite you to try this: Consciously breathe long, slow, deep breaths all the way down into your belly. Exaggerate your exhales, making them longer than your inhales. This sends signals to the parasympathetic nervous system that everything is okay, allowing you to more fully relax.

Benefits of Breathing and Meditation

There are far too many benefits of mindful breathing and meditation to list them all. Here are just a few for your consideration:

1. Reduce stress, production and release of cortisol, and symptoms of stress-related conditions (i.e., irritable bowel syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder and fibromyalgia)
2. Control anxiety and panic attacks, especially when incorporating yoga (mind-body-spirit practice)
3. Reduce depression- Regular meditation produces measurable changes in activity in the areas of the brain related to positive thinking and optimism.
4. Enhance self-awareness- [Self-Inquiry Meditation](#) explicitly helps you develop a greater understanding of yourself and how you relate to those around you.
5. Lengthen attention span- "Focused-attention meditation" is like exercise for the mind. The more you do it, the better shape it will be in.
6. Reduce age-related memory loss- [Kirtan Kriya](#) is a method of meditation that combines a mantra or chant with repetitive motion of the fingers to focus thoughts. It improved participants' ability to perform memory tasks in multiple studies of age-related memory loss.
7. Generate kindness toward self and others- [Metta](#), a Buddhist loving-kindness meditation, begins with

developing kind thoughts and feelings toward yourself. Through practice, people learn to extend this kindness and forgiveness externally, first to friends, then acquaintances, and ultimately to enemies, and all sentient beings.

8. Improve sleep- As a group, those who meditate fall asleep quicker and stay asleep longer. You may wish to try Yoga Nidra for sleep, which is a meditative practice that induces relaxation organically. There are many versions available on the Insight Timer App.
9. Aid in Pain-Control- One's perception of pain is connected to one's state of mind, and can be elevated under stressful conditions. Studies have shown that those who meditate regularly show increased activity in the brain centers known to control pain and report less sensitivity to pain.
10. May help fight addictions- Increases awareness of triggers for addictive behaviors, allows space to pause and make a different choice.
11. Improve your overall sense of well-being

Breathing and Meditation Tips

Step 1: Slow Down! Take the time to consciously breathe every day, even if it's only for five minutes. This will make relaxation a habit that you can access in times of stress by putting it into the procedural memory (which creates shortcuts in the brain by repeating behaviors, whether desirable or otherwise).

Step 2: Make Friends with Your Diaphragm. Shallow breaths lead to increased stress, anxiety and feelings of powerlessness. Slow, deep belly breaths send signals to your brain that everything is okay and give it permission to relax. This changes not only one's emotional state, but her actual physiology.

Step 3: Designate a Sacred Space. Creating rituals and routines helps us to induce a state of relaxation more quickly. You may find it helpful to create an altar in this space that contains items of personal, spiritual, or other significance. If you don't have an area available for this, you may consider a box of these items that you open and place next to you.

Step 4: Commit to Meditating Every Day for at least 21 days (the length of time it takes to develop a new habit). Put it in your calendar on your phone as a non-negotiable. Set a reminder.

I recommend keeping a short meditation journal for this initial period of time to see your progress and be accountable. Make note of the emotions you experience, your ability to focus, tension (or lack thereof) in the the body, the types of thoughts you're experiencing, and your response to stressful situations, both in and out of meditation.

I invite you to consider getting an accountability partner. Check in everyday by phone or text whether you have meditated that day. You may wish to share which types of mediations are working best for you and some of your experiences as well.

Step 5: Download a Meditation App. I personally have used Insight Timer for nearly four years. I love it! It is a free app or you may pay for a subscription to receive additional benefits. Other free meditation apps are: Smiling Mind, Stop, Breathe, & Think, and UCLA Mindful. Some popular paid apps include: Calm, Headspace, Aura, 10% Happier, Buddhify, Sattva, and Inscape. You may read about the features of these here: <https://www.oprahmag.com/life/health/g29861798/best-meditation-apps/>

Step 6: Get quiet, go within, and ask yourself, "What do I need at this moment?" Allow yourself to be guided as to which type of meditation or breathing technique would best meet that need right now. (You will have

several from which to choose after reading this book.) Trust yourself to KNOW what is best for you.

Step 7: Meditate! Take action! If you are new to meditation, you may want to start with a guided meditation and/or a shorter time period. If you have downloaded an app, you may choose one specifically targeted to an area you'd like to improve. I recommend gradually increasing your meditation time until you reach your desired duration and result, which may be a feeling or state of mind.

Step 8: Celebrate! Give yourself a pat on the back for taking the time to care for yourself in one of the most kind, nurturing, self-affirming, loving ways possible! If you have an accountability partner, encourage, acknowledge, and celebrate each other.

Three Breathing Techniques

Breath Mindfulness (Counting the Rounds)

This is a great technique for quieting mental chatter, reducing stress, and increasing your focus and overall relaxation. It is great for every level of meditator from novice to guru, especially if the mind keeps wandering.

Technique:

Find a comfortable, seated position with a straight spine. Systematically and consciously relax every part of the body, starting with the head and face going all the way down to the toes.

Focus on the crown of the head and silently and slowly say to yourself, “relax...” the entire scalp, “relax...” the forehead, the eyebrows, the eye sockets, the temples, “relax...” the jaw, the cheeks, the nose, the lips, the inside of the mouth, the tongue, “relax...” the chin, the neck, the throat, “relax...” the shoulders, the chest, the upper and mid back, “relax...” the upper arms, the elbows, the lower arms, “relax...” the wrists, the hands, the fingers, the thumb, “relax...” the stomach, the low back, the hips and buttocks, “relax...”. The thighs, the hamstrings, the knees, the calves, “relax...” the ankles, the top of the foot, the sole of the foot, the toes, “relax.”

Now shift your focus to the breath and just notice where your breathing is the most *obvious* to you. Is it in your nose, your chest, or your abdomen? Allow the breath to move in and out effortlessly, simply noticing where you are most aware of it.

Next, gently start to count the rounds of breath. A round begins with an inhale and ends with a short

pause after the exhale. Notice that little gap after the exhale and silently say to yourself, “one.” As another cycle of breath comes and goes, silently say to yourself, “two.”

Count all the way up to ten and then start again at one. If you notice your mind drifting away with a thought, you may gently wish to say to yourself, “thought,” and return to the last number that you remember on the very next breath. Allow the breath and the counting to come naturally, easily, and effortlessly—flowing in and out.

You may wish to set a timer or to continue until you feel a shift in your energy, clarity, focus, relaxation or presence.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

This is a simple yet powerful technique that settles and balances the mind, body, and emotions. It is great to quiet the mind prior to meditation, particularly if you are experiencing stress, anxiety, or racing thoughts. It offers a wide range of benefits. (See the chart on page 22.)

Technique:

1. Find a comfortable seated position, with a straight, upright spine.
2. Relax the left hand in the lap, palm facing upward, with index finger and thumb gently touching (in *Gyan Mudra* as shown below).



Gyan Mudra

3. With the right hand, bring the index and middle fingers to rest between the eyebrows lightly, using them as an anchor.
4. Close the eyes and physically focus on the third eye, the point right between the eyebrows. Maintain this eye position throughout the technique. Take a deep breath in and out through the nose.
5. Close the right nostril with the right thumb. Slowly and steadily, inhale through the left nostril.
6. Close the left nostril with the ring finger so both nostrils are held closed; retain the breath for a moment.
7. Open the right nostril and release the breath slowly through the right side; pause briefly after the exhale.
8. Close the left nostril with the ring finger and inhale slowly through the right side.
9. Hold both nostrils closed (with ring finger and thumb).
10. Open the left nostril and release the breath slowly through the left side, pausing briefly after the exhale.

11. Complete 5-10 cycles, allowing the mind to follow your inhales and exhales. Always **switch nostrils after the inhale**.

***Special note: Inhale Left/Exhale Right:** Calms and integrates unwanted negative emotions and stress. This is excellent by itself before bed.

Inhale Right/Exhale Left: Gives clarity, boosts mood, and increases energy. Helps you to focus on what's important.

*Breath of Fire (BOF)**

This technique is by far my personal favorite! It provides the greatest number of benefits in the shortest amount of time (gives you the biggest bang for your buck!). Whenever I have gotten stuck in some old thinking pattern, want to break out of a limiting belief, or change my entire physiology rapidly, this is my *go to* technique!

This breath is considered by many yogis and spiritual gurus to be *the key to higher consciousness*. Its aim is to increase your creative and spiritual potential in order to help you uphold your values, speak your truth, and focus on the compassion and consciousness needed to serve and heal yourself and others. (One way to serve and heal others is by taking care of yourself!)

Breath of Fire comes from the kundalini yoga tradition and works to improve focus and concentration, induce mental, emotional, and physiological calmness, increase energy, and reduce stress, worry, and fears. When done regularly with intention, it can help you to overcome negative habits or addictive behaviors.

This is a very effective technique for releasing resentments.

Breath of Fire (BOF) is a sophisticated breath-control technique that is an amazing tool to improve one's overall spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical health and wellbeing. BOF is rapid, rhythmic, and continuous breathing with **equal emphasis** on the inhale and the exhale, no deeper than sniffing. There is **NO PAUSE** between breaths. This changes our physiology almost immediately.

Technique:

1. Find a comfortable seated position in a chair or on the ground with a straight spine, with the back preferably away from the back of the chair (not resting on anything). **Close the eyes and the mouth.** Physically and mentally focus on the third eye, the point right between the eyebrows. Maintain this eye position throughout the technique.
2. Take a slow, deep inhale through the nose, hold for a moment, and sigh it out through the mouth.
3. Rapidly sniff through the nose (inhale) as you allow the stomach to fill with air and fully expand.
4. Pull the navel point towards the spine forcefully as you exhale powerfully through the nose. This should be audible and fairly loud. With practice, aim to do

this as rapidly as 2-3 times per second. If you become dizzy or lightheaded, slow your pace.

5. When done correctly, the hands, feet, face, and abdomen will be relaxed, not gripping or tense. Also remember to maintain the chest in a relaxed and slightly lifted position throughout this practice.
6. Begin practicing BOF for a duration of 1-3 minutes. This can be physically taxing at first, but you will reap the benefits almost immediately afterward. I have found these benefits to be so profound that any effort has been well worth it! The ultimate goal is to work your way up to 5-15 minutes continuously. You may wish to begin with several shorter sets. With practice, over time and if done correctly, this practice becomes effortless.

Tip for Starting Out:

Begin with the tongue out, panting like a dog. This can be easier to visualize and get into the cells of the body. Once this becomes easy, pull the tongue back into the mouth and begin breathing only through the nose, following the previous guidelines.

Advanced Practice:

Pull the fingertips back to the pads of your hands, just below the fingers and hold them there firmly. Thumbs are straight and pointed toward the ceiling or sky. Extend the arms straight up and out to a 60 degree angle (in a V- see photo below). Maintain them extended and straight throughout the practice. Be aware that there is a tendency to let them drop. Gently bring your attention back to the arms occasionally.



Breath of Fire Advanced practice Arm and Hand Position

*BOF should not be practiced by pregnant women or women in the first two days of their menstrual cycle.

Benefits of Various Breathing Techniques

Benefit	Breath Mindfulness (Basic Ten)	Alternate Nostril Breathing	Breath of Fire
Improves Spiritual Connection			✓
Releases Resentments			✓
Prepares the Body and Mind for Action		✓	
Reduces Anxiety	✓	✓	✓
Improves Focus, Centering, and Calmness	✓	✓	✓
Increases Energy and Alertness		✓	✓
Offers Protection from the Negative Energy of Others			✓
Reduces Fears, Regret, and Worry/ Increases Willpower		✓	
Quiets Mental Chatter/ Reduces Stress	✓	✓	✓ (Quickly)
Synchronizes Mind, Body, and Spirit			✓
Helps Overcome Negative Habits and Addictions			✓
Balances the Brain to Prepare for Deeper Meditation		✓	
Relieves Headaches and Migraines		✓	
Creates a Deep Sense of Well-Being and Happiness		✓	✓
Reduces Pain and Depression			✓

Conclusion

Whether you are brand new to mindfulness or have an established practice, my hope is that you have acquired some practical new tools to either begin a life-giving new habit or enhance your current practice that will enable you to be “*the calm in the eye of the hurricane.*”

I invite you to try each of these techniques TODAY! Right now! Prepare to be amazed at how much better you feel!

Practical Action Steps

1. Decide the length of time and what time of day you will meditate each day and put it in your calendar as a non-negotiable. (I prefer to meditate first thing in the morning to set myself up for peace, happiness, clarity, focus, and optimism.)
2. Download Insight Timer or the meditation app of your choice so you are ready to go right away.
3. Buy a meditation journal and keep it next to you when you meditate.
4. Be kind to yourself. Observe the thoughts that occur without judging them. The goal of meditation is not to clear the mind; it is simply to slow it down and to observe the thoughts without attaching to them.
5. Have fun! This practice gets to be enjoyable!

About the Author



Karen Seltz, M.Ed., CLC

Karen Seltz is a women's spirituality and mindset coach and a transformational public speaker. Her mission is to create a world in which every woman knows her worth and her purpose, commits to showing up authentically and unapologetically, and plays full out. Karen often works with purpose-driven, spiritual women who know they have a higher calling. She supports them in stepping out of their comfort zones with courage and power to create full, impactful, and fulfilling lives.

Karen is known for fearlessly sharing her darkest moments of depression, addiction, and spiritual confusion with openness and vulnerability. Her intention is to connect with each client and audience member in a profound and insightful way to allow her to acknowledge the reason she is here, live her

purpose, and make meaningful contributions and connections by sharing her unique story and special talents with the world.

Karen is the founder of *Happiness Guru* (<https://www.HappinessGuru.net>). She has been a Certified Life Coach (CLC) and Brain Gym® Consultant for over 17 combined years and has a Master's of Education in Counseling.

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