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—Jinen Jason Shulman, author of *Kabbalistic Healing*

CRAZY WORLD, PEACEFUL HEART

*6 Core Practices
for Cultivating
Joy and
Resilience*



SHARON HELENE ROSEN

Praise for Sharon Rosen and *Crazy World, Peaceful Heart*:

“This is a small book filled with Big Grace. I am especially inspired by its down-to-earth quality, since I know that “down-to-earth” is the best road to Heaven. May this sweet and wise book of healing find a home in many hearts!”

~ Jinen Jason Shulman, author of *Kabbalistic Healing; The Instruction Manual for Receiving God; and founder of A Society of Souls School for Non-Dual healing.*

“This beautifully written book wraps its arms around you like a comforting, wise mother. You’ll feel calmer just reading it; however it also offers a variety of simple and practical activities to help you recapture a sense of peace in this hectic world in which we live. Sharon’s approach is down-to-earth and spiritual at the same time, acknowledging the realities of life while also reminding us that just because the world is crazy doesn’t mean we have to be, too.”

~ Debbie LaChusa, author of *Breaking the Spell: The Truth About Money, Success, and the Pursuit of Happiness*

“In *Crazy World, Peaceful Heart*, Sharon Rosen distills wit & wisdom that actually work. She shows, from experience and deep inquiry, how we can weave difficulty and challenge into the fabric of a wise, compassionate life. There are numerous gems here — why we forget to practice what we know is good for us, how to cultivate joy and resilience every mundane day, and so much more. And a bonus — for this pragmatic, non-Jewish creative, I found an inviting doorway to the Kabbalah’s wisdom.”

~ Jeffrey Davis, *Writer & Creativity Consultant, author of The Journey From The Center To The Page*

“*Crazy World, Peaceful Heart* inspires you with accessible wisdom and tools to befriend your body, mind, and spirit. Sharon Rosen’s healing muse is a precious gift to your life.”

~ *Laura Alden Kamm, author of Intuitive Wellness*

“Sharon Rosen’s *Crazy World, Peaceful Heart* is a generous guide to the ways of wisdom — from the most challenging like Kabbalah, to the most accessible like breathing as deeply as we can. From the most basic of principles like moving daily and with intention, to the quest to understand gratitude at its deepest level, Sharon takes our minds, hearts and hands and leads us toward how we can learn what we don’t know, and to remember what we forgot that we once knew. Hers is a gentle knowing that is deep and not dogmatic. Her voice encourages even as she knows full well how easily we falter. And the peaceful heart she promises is there within us to be found following her basic paths to joy through resilience.”

~ *Frances Bartkowski, author of Kissing Cousins:
A New Kinship Bestiary*

“Sharon helps us find the simple (but not easy) solutions in everyday life for building a resilient spirit. She beautifully weaves rich spiritual wisdom and exercises while expressing authentic feelings about life in this complex universe. She has provided us with a powerful life guide of daily principles. I felt blessed and uplifted as I read every word.”

~ *Bonnie Berke, Certified Holistic Health Counselor*

CRAZY WORLD, PEACEFUL HEART

6 Core Practices for Cultivating
Joy and Resilience



Sharon Helene Rosen



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*To each of us walking this human path; may we be
blessed with peace of mind in these troubled times.
Remember:*

It's not about perfection.
It's about awareness, and acceptance.
It's about living the full expression
of humanity that you are,
in all of your glory, all of your foolishness,
and all of your complexity,
with honesty and compassion.

INTRODUCTION:

Can't Stop The World

*I gave up looking for a reason
To live with things just the way they were...
Can't stop the world, can't stop the world,
can't stop the world, don't let it stop you.*

Go-Go's, Beauty and the Beat



This is a book about life. It's about the big, messy sprawl of it, “the full catastrophe” as described by fictional philosopher Zorba the Greek. It's about how to live in the reality of this rollicking ride — the pain, the loss, the triumphs, the joys — with your soul intact and thriving. Not because you somehow managed to transcend it all, but because you learned what you need to do to sit in the center of your life and not implode.

I want to share with you the idea that what it takes to maintain a peaceful heart in a crazy world is simple but not

necessarily easy. Simple in that the steps themselves are not especially exotic or out of reach: not easy because engaging in them doesn't always come naturally and takes a certain degree of introspection and effort. If you are reading this, then I know that introspection is something you are comfortable with; it's the effort part that has perhaps been more of a bumpy ride!

My own journey was quite bumpy for a long time. Although my earliest sense of myself is of being a happy and confident child (if Mom lost track of me during an outing, *I* wasn't lost, she just couldn't see me), I grew up in a family that was prone to depression on both sides. Some of it was biochemical — there was serious mental illness in my father's family — and some of it was generational. After all, we are Jews, one of the more enduringly persecuted people on earth. And I was born in the late 1950's to parents who came out of the Great Depression, experienced the aftermath of the Nazi regime and World War II, and carried the echo of all of that into our home life.

My own bouts of struggling with depression as a teen and young adult easily gave way to thinking I was doomed, that it was a set point to which I was naturally wired. Along with the tribal/ancestral connection, my grandfather had been hospitalized on several occasions, given shock treatments and mind zoning meds. I had seen my father sit in near silence for days on end, and felt the heavy energy permeating our whole house. And I knew the history of my mother's intense post-partum depression after giving birth to me had nearly cost her her life, and witnessed her recurring bouts with it over the years.

Yet I also experienced extended times of tremendous joy, creativity, connection and lightness, so I knew what

was possible. High school introduced me to the social sciences, and I found a true affinity for any “-ology” that explored human development and the intricacies of relationship with self and others. And I always felt a deep inner connection to the Divine. So, set loose into the world after obtaining a BA and deciding not to become a teacher as I’d always imagined, my twenties and thirties were a time of deep introspection. I explored psychological and spiritual teachings from many sources, immersing myself in books, meditation classes and large-scale personal growth workshops such as Actualizations and The Forum. (And yes, I do believe I “got it.” Then I lost it again for a while.)

After floundering through a few unsatisfying jobs, I stumbled onto a life path I never could have envisioned. My interest in massage and natural healing, spurred by some chronic health issues that doctors had no help for except pharmaceuticals, led me to a six-month course of study in shiatsu. It began as what I thought was simply a personal quest for healing and growth. I was actually so scared of the commitment involved in enrolling at a massage school, I chose that program partly because it was a one-on-one apprenticeship that I could pay for week by week rather than in one lump sum! If it didn’t suit me, well, I could walk away just having paid for whatever knowledge I had gathered. Little did I know when I arrived for my first class that it would lead to a 25-year career as a massage therapist, energy healer and holistic living guide.

Still, my movement on this healing path often felt like a journey of one step forward, two steps back (or more). There was all of that history to overcome. There was the

genetics, and then the realization that spending a weekend in a transformational workshop, wonderful and enlightening as it was, didn't necessarily mean that my whole life was transformed. It was more like "just when I thought I was becoming enlightened, I called my mother."

So I continued digesting and synthesizing everything I was learning and studying, eventually finding my way to an intensive four-year training in Kabbalistic Healing. In Kabbalah, I found the unifying themes that I had always felt in my bones and my heart. As a very young girl, I would go to Saturday morning services at our synagogue and feel deeply connected to God through the sounds of the Hebrew prayers and their ancient melodies. But when I would read the English translations of the prayers, I'd go blank—so many words, so much repetition, so much about good or bad, right or wrong, divisiveness and blame!

My inner experience was marked by a feeling of oneness, not duality. Those moments of connection sparked a desire to heal the parts of me that felt wounded by difficult life experiences and expressed those wounds as separation — from other people, from God and even from myself — and to live more from a recognition of the truth that I am always connected to my Source. Kabbalah gave me a unified theory and awakened a sense of wholeness that now weaves through my life and my work.

It is not my intention for this book to teach you about Kabbalah per se, which is beyond the scope of this small volume. But I want to share some key concepts from what I have learned, because I believe they will strengthen both the fabric of my words and your understanding of what it truly takes to have more peace in your heart.

Lessons From The Tribe

Kabbalah means “to receive” and is the core of the Jewish mystical tradition of wisdom received through years of deep study and prayer. For centuries it was shrouded in secrecy by Orthodox men, but in recent decades wise teachers have brought forth its teachings for those who crave spiritual knowledge and a deeper understanding of how life works. Kabbalah provides us with an elegant blueprint for how the universe came into being. It shows us that creation is an ongoing process and we are here to serve and co-create our world with the ultimate Creator.

I was fascinated to learn that the very first letter in Genesis, the first book of the Torah, is *beyt*, which is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This is because the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet has no true sound, and is understood to be the energy with which God “spoke” the world into being. And that first Hebrew word in Genesis, *bereishete*, in its most literal translation means “with beginningness” rather than the usual “in the beginning.”

This unique wording helps us to understand a couple of things. One, and perhaps most important of all, is that creation did not happen in one moment long ago — “in the beginning.” By making it a verb rather than a noun, “with beginningness” helps us to remember that creation is happening in every moment, and we are active participants in the process.

It also helps us to remember that without God, or however you define the Ultimate Source of Creation, nothing comes into being. So we are necessary as much as God is necessary for creation to happen. Or, as my Kabbalah teacher said the first

time I met him, “All healing — making whole — happens in relationship.” And all wholeness must by definition contain both the light and the dark, held in balance and mercy.

These are tender and mercurial times. The ability to nurture and maintain a peaceful heart is perhaps the most sought after, elusive and mystifying human quest. Part of the problem is that we hope one day to finally arrive at that place — after enough meditations, workshops and effort — and then stay there. The basic dilemma is that *it simply doesn't work that way*. Even the most enlightened master will cry when his child dies, or feel anger when he witnesses evil in action. It is the ability to hold all of it — to feel fully yet not hold tightly — that is the true sign of a peaceful heart.

The steps you take to develop this level of resilience do more than serve you personally as you deal with the ups and downs of your own life. Another key tenet from Judaism that guides and sustains me is called *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. That means with each interaction where you are not adding to the difficulties of the world, you are adding to the healing and restoration of the world. When you focus on strengthening your ability to flow more gracefully with the vicissitudes of life, you are doing more than just helping yourself to feel calm and centered; you are showing up in your life in ways that help others to respond differently to their own stresses and problems as well. As one writer put it:

Tikkun olam places our spiritual practice at the heart of the epic, unfolding history of the universe: the evolution and spiritualization of the whole of creation. With each small act of kindness, with

each moment of presence and practice, with each effort to see, cleanse, and integrate our inner life, with each heartfelt prayer opening to the higher energies and the higher will, we build the new world and serve the Divine Architect of meaning.

(Joseph Naft, InnerFrontier.org)

So please, take exquisite care of yourself...it's actually for the highest good of all beings and our planet that you do! Especially when it is done with *kavannah*, which translates as "direction of the heart." When your actions are guided by your kavannah — the intention and consciousness that comes from the inherent wisdom of your heart — taking time each day to cultivate joy and resilience goes beyond any whisper of selfishness, and becomes the stuff of universal healing.

Many Paths, One Destination

What you will find in these pages is an exploration of practices that have nurtured and supported me and the many clients with whom I have shared them. They will help you engage in the ongoing work of cultivating inner resilience, moving again and again from the confusion of the head to the wisdom of the heart and body. This is not a step-by-step system that needs to be followed in order, one piece before another. Each practice has an ability to shift and heal you, bringing you back into relationship with your most essential self.

I have found that “what works” changes depending on where I am in the moment, and it’s taken me a long time to allow that to be OK. So many books and teachings have ‘their way’ and focus on the importance of sticking to one way and going deep with it. There is the “sit totally still and don’t so much as scratch your nose” form, the “follow your breath in every moment and allow all thoughts to pass through like clouds” form, the “move and sweat and shake it out till you drop” form; all offer a sincere and dedicated path to remembering our connection to the Divine.

But just as there are some mornings when focusing on my breath or a mantra is enough and I can go with and stay with that, there are just as many when it’s simply not working. My mind is racing, my heart is twisted with anxiety, and I’m just too antsy or enervated to still myself easily.

This is when I will turn to either chanting or movement to bring myself back to my knowing — the knowing in my body, the body which houses my heart and my spirit. Using my voice, feeling the shapes of the words in my mouth and the vibration of the notes in my cells, grounds me in the moment and opens me to the ever present truth of my connection with my Source.

Allowing myself to dance in my seat, or stand, sway and stretch in whatever way brings a sense of alive presence, helps me to realize that silence and meditation are not the only or best conduits to consciousness.

Or some days the opposite is true — there has been so much motion and purposeful action that I long to simply sit and breathe and become still as I connect to my heart. This is when I remember what I know by following the flow

of my breath as it moves through my body, or placing one hand on my heart and chanting a name of God over and over again, till nothing else exists.

- ❧ **What helps you feel connected to yourself, even if you don't think of it as spiritual or special?**
- ❧ **What have you learned from teachers along the way that truly resonates and helps you to source the Divine in a real and intimate way?**
- ❧ **What practices give you the greatest sense of joy and freedom from conflict?**

These are questions to keep in mind as you make your way through these pages.

In Chapter One, you will learn about why balance always has to include difficulty, and how to not use that as an excuse to shut down or give up. You will be introduced to The Basics and why the simplest steps are the most essential ones to master.

The rest of the chapters lay out specific practices that are each designed to help you connect with yourself on a soul level. Some are as natural as breathing; others help you tap into your creativity and self-nurturance. Some involve sitting still and others invite you to move your body and reconnect with its natural rhythms.

Read through the chapters and then feel free to use whatever you are most drawn to as your entry point. It is helpful to have a journal and pen handy so you can make note of insights, go deeper into what may arise as you try different practices, or answer questions posed within the text like those listed above.

You may want to focus on a particular area, like movement or inquiry, and go deeply with that over the course of several weeks. Or you might work with one practice per day for a while and cycle through as your guidance compels you. There is no one right or perfect way to approach the work of finding your resilient center and connecting to your joy. My job is to point out the blazes on the trail; the steps you take upon it are your own.

Steps Make The Path

There is much to be done
there is much to be done
Saying it twice illuminates
just how much and how true.

Cast a circle around you and make
one clear prayer
Watch steam rise from
your teacup and know that
everything
is alive with magic.

Begin here.
Each next step
will present itself
unendingly...

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CHAPTER ONE

What You Once Knew

I forget to remember that I know what I know...



So let's begin at the beginning. Once upon a time you were a baby crawling on the floor. You came upon a fallen raisin, picked it up in your not-too-agile fingers, and most likely put it in your mouth. Ooohhh, sweet! Chewy... dense...sticky...gone! Then the colors of a plant on the windowsill drew your attention. Off you shuffled until you got to a place where you could reach out and pull yourself up to standing, motivated by a pure desire to touch the green leaves — *soft* — and purple blossoms — *softer and strong smelling*.

Years have passed and now you are a woman (or man) at work, sitting in front of a computer, holding a phone to your ear or, in an effort to avoid neck strain, wearing a hands-free headset. Your client is giving you information in a quick,

urgent tone. Your eyes are glued to the screen, searching various files for the ones you need, and your headset is beginning to hurt your ear.

Too much input! Too much stimulation! The richness and stillness of that time long ago is barely available to you now, except for the rare moments you might spend in a workshop or yoga class. These days when you walk, you are with a friend talking or have headphones in your ears moving you forward with music or an audio book. While you might have some awareness of the environment around you, you're more focused on getting in the requisite miles than taking time to stand in front of a tree and engage silently with its strong, solid presence.

What for your infant self was an effortless connection to natural rhythms is now lost in a cacophony of outer noise and chaos that fosters inner confusion. And that confusion keeps you from knowing how to reliably recapture the sense of wonder and ease that had once been your natural habitat.

No matter how much we learn and know, ultimately life is a mystery, an intricately wrapped package whose colorful ribbons are difficult to tease apart and smooth out. And what most of us want more than anything is a simple way to unknot the ties that bind us. As a lifelong seeker and a healer, the most elusive understanding is why it's so hard to consistently do the things I know help me feel like my best self. Sometimes it's all flowing, sometimes I'm stuck in my own muck; but after years of playing "good girl, bad girl," I've gathered tools and inner resources that help me, as Nike so succinctly puts it, *Just do it* (or, as one neuroscientist riffed, "just do it, a little bit more than you don't").

It's so easy to get caught up in learning some new complex system, or pick up countless books and DVD's to help guide you, and then find yourself on to the next new thing, leaving what you had previously gathered to collect dust. It still is my default mode when I'm tired and stressed, grabbing at things and thinking, "maybe this will do it, maybe that will be the answer, maybe that new shirt in the perfect shade of blue will make me feel better."

Yet in all of that reaching outward and searching for salvation, a single theme has always run through my mind: "The basics are the basics for a reason; because if you actually take time to do them, they work!" Basics like:

- Breathing fully and consciously.
- Drinking plenty of water.
- Eating more fruits and vegetables, fewer processed foods and sweets.
- Moving your body every day.
- Making time for quiet, contemplation and stillness.

Variations on these topics are in every issue of every health and beauty magazine. The headlines try to make it sound like something new and exciting, but how often do we need to be told that exercise and broccoli are good for us? Apparently often because most of us still haven't quite gotten the message. If they are so universal and so good for us, the question remains, "Why don't I do the things I know make me feel my best? How can I live in a way that keeps

me connected to my heart and the deep wisdom and mercy that reside there?”

Running and Returning

There was a great sense of relief when I learned the concept of *running and returning*. The ancient Kabbalists teach that, “*If your heart runs {from its ultimate connection}, return it to the Place (Makom).*” Makom is a name of God, meaning the Omnipresent; it reminds us that everything in existence is imbued with Divinity, and also points directly to the idea that we are always moving toward and away from our wholeness.

In my late 20’s I wrote a journal entry that foreshadowed this teaching:

I forget to remember that I know what I know, so I am going to write until it all becomes clear. The knowing began the moment I was conceived, a moment of love and heat and dampness in which I rooted myself and began to grow. And it ended the moment I was brought into a world that forced air into my lungs and light into my eyes and sound into my ears...the forgetting began and continued to grow until I realized that I would never be comfortable living in my own skin until I could figure out what was missing. What was missing was a clear connection to the Source of all life. No, not missing, hidden; not completely forgotten and yet not fully recognized.

We forget and remember, forget and remember. Years later I heard a Jewish fable that perfectly echoed what I'd written:

When babies are born, they have full knowledge of God and the deeper mysteries. But at the moment of birth an angel comes and puts a finger just above the lip, whispering "Shhhhhh, forget everything, speak not of what you know." This creates the little hollow between the nose and upper lip, and is why we spend our lives searching for something that is right under our nose all along.

Longing is built into the very fiber of your being. It is a chord that is struck the day you are born and keeps reverberating, causing you to search for a spiritual path that brings harmony to your soul. We all long to connect with what we are completely immersed in, like the proverbial fish that doesn't know what water is because water is the very atmosphere of its existence.

This teaching helps us understand that cycling in and out is an essential part of being human, as we are reminded in these words from Ecclesiastes made famous in song by Pete Seeger — "A time to build up, a time to break down, A time to dance, a time to mourn, A time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together."

The Forgetting Factor

When you recognize and accept the paradox that forgetting to do the things that support spiritual alignment is actually a part of life's continuum, you can begin to have some compassion for yourself and your own dance of starting and stopping. If fallow periods are a necessary part of planting and harvesting crops, then why would they not be part of a meditation practice, a yoga practice, or a healthy eating practice?

Remembering that truth can help shift the energy from stuck to fluid, bringing a sense of mercy and compassion to what seem like individual shortcomings and weaknesses. That in itself may be the very springboard that will get you off of the couch and onto the yoga mat, or out to the store for some fresh salad fixings instead of unearthing that frozen dinner hidden away as insurance.

Life is endlessly pulsating, shifting from expansion to stasis and every level in between. Even when things feel stuck and stagnant, there is an underlying quality of movement that is always available for us to tune into. Go underneath the stories of why you feel stuck and how that somehow makes you a 'bad person' as opposed to simply human. Remember to connect with this pulsating quality and see how it supports you in making a shift.

It's so easy when you're feeling low or stuck to think you'll always feel that way. The good times might not ever last nor were they meant to; but you can slowly increase their power by catching yourself in a downturn and taking even the smallest steps toward connecting with a vision of your larger self. It means never forgetting that without dark you

cannot truly know light, and without sadness, happiness would cease to permeate in quite the same way with its precious sense of expansiveness.

Working off of the earlier idea of *The Basics*, I thought about the simple practices I've come back to over and over again when the world threatens to come crashing in, and came up with six key concepts that help set the stage for greater peace of mind. How? By developing an ability to be profoundly attuned and unconditionally kind to your self. By approaching the work of taking care of yourself from the inside out rather than the outside in. With that in place, you may just find it's easier to make choices that nurture your body; that you are responding with greater equanimity when the people in your life are driving you crazy; and that you can be in the world, with all of its chaos and pain, with an open and compassionate heart.

As you explore and play with these exercises and concepts, pay attention to your experience of the pulsating quality of running and returning. Keep in mind your natural tendency to forget how truly connected you are, within your holy body and beyond—remember that you are a conscious co-creator with the Infinite. Let this knowledge lead you back as you would a small child about to take the wrong path to the playground.

In that playground you are building a bridge, one that will take you from intellectual knowing to full presence knowing, from ideology to the ability to harvest from your own wisdom. The path to a peaceful heart is paved with kindness, a light touch, small steps and skillful use of these simple practices.

The Basics For Cultivating Joy and Resilience



BREATHE

to connect to your inner knowing

ACCLIMATE

to your own rhythms

SIMPLIFY

your thinking through inquiry

INITIATE

small physical movements daily

CONSULT

your inner guidance system

SANCTIFY

daily life with gratitude

CHAPTER TWO

Breathe to Connect to Your Inner Knowing

All breath is movement. All movement originates with inhaling and exhaling. All movement becomes elaborated by the breadth of breath. Breath is an invitation for a greater intelligence to come and dance.

Emilie Conrad, *Life On Land*



Your breath is the perfect vehicle for uniting more closely with yourself and your Source. You know how easy it is to get behind the wheel of your car, turn the key, back out of the driveway and find yourself at work half an hour later with little conscious recall of how you actually got there? If it's easy to lose track of yourself while maneuvering a complex piece of machinery, you can see how easy it is to

never really think about breathing, which happens whether you're thinking about it or not.

But given that breath is the vehicle that drives us through life—far more critical even than food or liquid—how much farther might we get down life's highway with some care and focused attention given to it?

We walk through much of life in various split states; the head from the body, the torso from the legs, the dominant side from the non-dominant side. And we go through much of our day with our consciousness separate from the breath and with the breath separate from the full torso, and especially from the extremities. Automatic breathing keeps us alive but is far from the fullest expression of our life force. Like the car trip you can barely remember, disconnection from your breath leads to missing out on feeling fully connected to yourself.

How do you know when you've been disconnected from your breath or other parts of your being? It hits you in those moments when you suddenly come home to yourself, when you wake from the dream of running through life and really savor a perfectly buttered bite of toast or a streak of sun coming out from behind a cloud. In those moments you spontaneously take a deep breath and move from feeling like a walking head to remembering you are an embodied spirit.

Three Part Breath

This is the simplest thing you can do to center yourself, but remember simple doesn't always mean easy! In fact one of the reasons we tend to overlook the simplest, dare I say most basic things, is because life is complex and so we tend to look for equally complex solutions. And yet, simple is

what helps us focus our awareness and tune our senses to clarity rather than confusion. It is like the sword of a Zen master cutting through delusion with swift and electrifying precision.

Taking a few moments to just be with your breathing is actually a radical act. It entails that you stop doing and simply be present in your body in this moment.

It also requires you to pay attention, and that might bring to the surface some uncomfortable feelings that you are usually busy trying to not experience fully. In those precious moments of quiet, you might also feel anxiety, fear, loneliness, craving or any number of less desirable emotions that are a natural part of being human.

We are afraid that if we let ourselves feel these difficult emotions we will be swept away by them when the opposite is true—by letting ourselves feel things fully with compassion and courage, they can move through us like wind through a chime, leaving only a resonant note behind.



TRY THIS when you feel like you're in a hamster wheel or find yourself emotionally overreacting to outside stimuli.

- Sit or stand in a relaxed yet upright position. You want to feel supported by either the chair or the floor, spine erect but not stiff. Begin by emptying your lungs completely of breath, pulling your belly in and exhaling as fully as possible.
- As you begin to inhale, bring the breath down into your belly first, allowing the abdomen to expand. Your diaphragm is shaped like a

parachute along the lower rim of the ribcage, moving down as it engages on the inhale and up as it releases on the exhale. Letting your belly relax gives your diaphragm space to engage fully and lower, making room for your lungs to expand more fully than in unconscious respiration.

- Now allow the breath to fill your chest from the bottom to the top, so that the last stage of the inhale expands into your upper chest and ribcage.
- When you are ready, exhale in the opposite direction, so that you release the breath from the top of the chest first and then through the lower chest, with the abdomen emptying and pulling in last.

Try placing one hand on the belly and the other on the upper chest to help you tangibly experience the flow of breath in and out of your body. The movements of this breath often feel counterintuitive, especially if you are primarily a chest or belly breather. By using three part breathing, you are expanding all the parts of your torso—pay attention to how it feels not just in the front of your body, but also the sides and back. Feel how many dimensions there are when you breathe this way.

If it feels at all uncomfortable or frustrating, take it slowly. Be patient, gentle and compassionate with your body as it tries on this new way of breathing. Most of the time we are barely using one fourth of our lungs' full capacity! With practice your secondary muscles of respiration, seldom

utilized during normal shallow breathing, will come into play and allow you to take in more and more oxygen over time. This alone will give your nervous system more resilience, fluidity and calm.

Deepening Presence with Mantra

Once you are comfortable with the basic breath, begin to anchor your presence by adding a verbal touchstone or mantra. One of the most simple and beautiful declarations I know of is to simply announce “Here I am,” and an evocative way to do it is with the Hebrew word *hineni* (hee-nay-nee). By declaring *hineni* we are offering our full spiritual presence, stating that we are ready and willing to show up for ourselves and for our relationship with the Divine.

Since biblical times, when both Abraham and Moses responded to the call of the Lord in this way, the word *hineni* offers a powerful statement of presence, purpose and possibility. It is so much more than simply saying “Yoo hoo, here I am, over here!” It is a way of saying to your heart, your soul and your Creator, “Here I am, ready and willing to be fully present, to offer myself up as part of the healing of the world through deepening my consciousness and my ability to serve with love.”

Try saying *hineni* or *here I am* slowly and quietly as you breathe through your entire torso, using the basic three-part breath. Practice saying it any time you wake from an unconscious place and want to offer your intention to spend more time being aware of life’s unfolding moments.

Another phrase that I find helpful, especially when I am struggling and life feels particularly challenging, is *ki tov*

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(kee tove) — *It is good.* This is what God declared after each phase of creation. Breathing into your heart and declaring *ki tov* about whatever is happening can help you recall that life's difficulties are also opportunities. They help to polish your rough edges and learn where your true strength lies.

🌀 What favorite mantras or verbal touchstones bring you a sense of spiritual support and connection?