Everything goes black. Tricia Kennedy thinks she is dead. It feels peaceful until the pain sets in. Then it is excruciating. The noise is deafening. The light is blinding. She realizes that she has been shot in the head. Kennedy was in a shooting competition when a bullet accidentally hit her. Luckily, a nurse was nearby and ran to her aid. Kennedy’s heart rate was dangerously high and the nurse told her, “You must breathe. You are going into shock, and we’re going to lose you.” The word “breathe” stuck in Kennedy’s frazzled mind. A year and a half earlier, she took a class on pistols. Her teacher taught her a 4-step technique called “combat breathing.” Breathe in through your nose for a count of four. Hold your breath for a count of four. Exhale through your mouth for a count of four. And then hold your breath again for a count of four. With her life on the line, her training took over. Slowing her breathing down increased the oxygen in her body and saved her life. Breath has been linked to well-being for a very long time, and not just because we need oxygen to survive. Pranayama, for example, is a Hindu breathing technique used to increase the vital energy of the body and mind. The benefits of this ancient practice have long been known, but Western science is just now catching up. Scientists at Northwestern University recently found that the rhythm of your breath enhances emotional judgment and memory recall. Interestingly, these effects only happened when inhaling through the nose. Exhaling and breathing through the mouth did not have the same effect. In other words, how we breathe is important. Breathing techniques have also helped people deal with past trauma. Soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are usually treated with medication, but the recovery rates are low. One study on the effects of yoga and breathing practices in veterans had impressive results. PTSD, anxiety, and insomnia decreased significantly in just one week! These improvements were still present a year later, leading some to believe that the change would be permanent. Breathing is a wonderful thing. It keeps us alive and we do it without practice, thinking or effort. But when we apply focus and attention to the breath, we shine a light on the mind-body connection and tap into our body’s natural ability to heal.

Hypnosis is a form of direct communication with the unconscious mind. It is a valuable tool for raising self-awareness. It can also help people change negative patterns of behavior. It was accidentally invented by a man named Franz Anton Mesmer. Mesmer belongs to a small group of people who have a verb named after them. To ‘mesmerize’ means to capture the complete attention of someone. Mesmer spent a lifetime trying to do exactly that. Mesmer was born in Germany in 1734. He graduated from the University of Vienna with honors in law and medicine. Mesmer was a believer in Isaac Newton’s idea that the moon’s magnetic pull influenced the ocean’s tides. Mesmer applied the same logic to the human body. He coined the expression ‘animal magnetism.’ Mesmer believed all living things possess a magnetic fluid. This fluid, which he likened to electricity, was key to people’s well-being. When the magnetic fluid was in harmony people remained healthy. When it was out of whack or blocked, people became ill. Mesmer used magnets on his patients. He believed they could remove blockages and allow for the free-flowing of the fluid. Vienna’s elite society hailed the mesmeric treatment a great success. It was the calm before the storm. In 1777, his claim to cure blind piano prodigy, Maria Theresia von Paradis was met with scorn. Apparently, Paradis could see when Mesmer was in the room. When he left, she became blind again. This and reports of inappropriate touching forced Mesmer to flee to Paris in 1778. The French welcomed him with open arms. Soon he had over 200 rich and sickly aristocrats queuing for his services every day. Individual treatment became problematic, so Mesmer devised a simple solution – the baquet. Mesmer claims to have personally magnetized this unusual contraption. It consisted of a large wooden tub filled with iron, glass bottles, and water. Patients would sit, holding hands in a circle around the baquet. At the same time, Mesmer circled the room, dressed as a wizard. The mainly female patients would erupt in violent fits or hysterical laughter. Mesmer would then remove them to a separate crisis room for further treatment. This procedure was greeted with raised eyebrows. In 1784, King Louis XVI – whose wife, Marie Antoinette, was one of Mesmer’s patients – took action. He ordered a commission to examine the medical man’s methods. The commission said there was no such thing as magnetic fluid. Mesmer left Paris with his tail between his legs. He wandered Europe as an exile for the rest of his life and died in 1815. Mesmer’s theories of magnetic fluid may have been mystical mumbo-jumbo. Yet many patients still said his techniques were a success. By accident or design, Mesmer used suggestive mental states for positive outcomes. By addressing the unconscious mind, he cured his patients of psychological ailments. It was simply hypnosis by another name.