

# YOGA for small spaces

by Caroline Sherwood

**K**um Nye yoga comes from the ancient Tibetan medical tradition and was often practised by monks to assist them when sitting in meditation for long hours in confined spaces. The name means 'interaction with the subtle body' referring to the way in which the very slow movements, combined with gentle breathing encourage an awareness of embodiment which penetrates deeper than our usual more superficial bodily awareness.

The slowness of the movements and the unusual shapes of some of the exercises encourages the energy that we normally hold in deep tension to be released. While quietly sitting for a few minutes after each exercise that energy can then redistribute around the body, bringing with it deep relaxation and revitalisation. Kum Nye has sometimes been humorously described as the Heineken of exercise systems, because it refreshes the parts that other systems can't reach...

The focus is on the sensations generated by the movement. By focusing on the feeling of the energy moving in the body, we gently encourage ourselves to come into the present moment, rather than fragmenting ourselves as we so often do, when the physical body is engaged in one activity while our mind is elsewhere. Through Kum Nye we can come to enjoy and appreciate being embodied in this human form.

The exercises are divided into those which lead to balance and integration and others which are designed to stimulate and transform energies. This takes place at all levels - physical, psychological and emotional and can be experienced at three distinct levels of increasingly subtle relaxation and inner opening.

Tarthang Tulku describes how each exercise can be experienced in three ways - positive,

negative and neutral. These terms are not judgments,' he says, 'it is as important to feel and work with negative qualities as it is to work with positive ones. Awareness of these qualities is an important part of each exercise: positive feeling can be recognized as a warm, soft and gentle sensation located primarily in the heart area; negative feeling tends to manifest itself as a dull, dark heaviness in the lower abdomen; neutral feeling possesses a quality of light, balanced stillness, which permeates the entire body and beyond into the surrounding space.

With time you will discover different levels of feeling and experience, until eventually you gain awareness of the energy that is present within every atom and molecule of your being. When this occurs you can increase your contact with this energy until every part of your body becomes a source of energy. Once you realize that energy is without location, that it is abundant and available at any time, you can truly experience the integration of body and mind.'

Names such as 'Loosening Up the Mind,' 'Increasing Endurance,' 'Transforming Emotions,' 'Touching Positive Feeling,' and 'Building Strength and Confidence' point to the way in which Kum Nye has profound benefits on our emotional and mental health as well as increasing physical strength, relaxation, stamina and energy.

You don't need to be religious or even to like physical exercise to be able to gain benefit from Kum Nye practice. It is suitable for all age groups and students of all fitness levels.

*Caroline Sherwood attended the 3 month Kum Nye training at the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley in 1981 and taught meditation and Kum Nye workshops and retreats for 30 years. Recently she has retired from teaching to concentrate on writing. She is the author of 'Making Friends with Ourselves: Introducing Children to Meditation' and 'Naming: Choosing a Meaningful Name.' Her experience of being a prison visitor has convinced her of the value of this form of Tibetan yoga for both prisoners and staff.*



## How to Find Out More and Ways to Start Practising Kum Nye:

Books by Tarthang Tulku, published by Dharma Publishing:  
Kum Nye Tibetan Yoga - explanatory texts with all the exercises. You can begin to teach yourself from this book.

The Joy of Being - advanced Kum Nye: sensory and movement exercises

You should be able to order these books through the library system.

Invite a Teacher to your Prison: If you would like to experience an introductory Kum Nye workshop, please write to Bram Williams, c/o Inside Time or email him - bram@bodhi-yoga.co.uk E Kum Nye: The online E Course offers a 5-level year long training. Each class consists of a video introduction, theory, 60-90 minute practice session, 5 minute meditations, suggestions for practice to engage during the day, reading assignments and a meditation video. www.kumnyeyoga.eu If you are soon to be released: Kum Nye classes are held in various UK locations. Details at www.kumnyeu.org



## Tarthang Tulku

Tarthang Tulku was born in Tibet in 1934 and is a lama from the Nyingma tradition - the most ancient of Tibetan Buddhism. He was educated in pre-invasion Tibet by some of the greatest spiritual masters of his time. When forced to flee his native land, he went first to India where he taught for some time at the Sanskrit University of Benares.

In 1969 he settled in Berkeley, California where in 1972 he established the Nyingma Institute which offers a rich human development programme.

"In all you do, remember that Kum Nye is your armament against negativity that scratches from within or affects you through others. It is knowledge that you can master and sustain through mindfulness...It is important to make strong efforts to develop this knowledge and apply it. You can do this by reminding yourself daily: There is beauty that you have not yet seen. There is sound that carries consciousness into heavenly spheres. There is fragrance more exquisite than the rarest incense. There is joy that expands beyond ecstasy and dissolves the seeds of suffering. You deserve to experience all these treasures and manifest their significance to all humanity." Tarthang Tulku

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