

Recovering Your Body

Turn to The Five Tibetans for strength.

by Thom Forbes



I was comparing notes on exercise routines with an old friend, Audrey Cozzarin, at a party last year when she asked me if I'd heard of the Five Tibetans. Before I knew it, she had me spinning like a dervish, standing with palms down and arms outstretched, in our host's living room. This first exercise, Cozzarin told me, would center and ground me in the present.

Slightly dizzy and fearful of upending the canapés on an end table, I stopped after about 10 spins. That was fine, Cozzarin assured me. As with the four yoga-like movements to come, she cautioned me to do only as many repetitions as I was comfortable doing with the goal of working up to 21 over time and no more. Indeed, experts in the Tibetans all say that nothing is to be gained beyond 21 reps. And, as with any exercise, it's better to do fewer properly than a higher number with incorrect form.

I then followed Cozzarin's directive to inhale deeply through my nose into my abdomen before exhaling through pursed lips a couple of times. This is called the "interim breath" and is done between each exercise.

She then told me to lay flat on my back with my palms facing down at my sides. I raised my head and touched my chest with my chin as I simultaneously lifted my legs from my hips, peaking just past 90 degrees. Again, I could only do a handful correctly at the time, despite being in pretty good shape.

"There's no need to be so ego driven that you feel you have to be muscle man or woman," says Cozzarin, who has been studying and teaching yoga for 30 years. "Plus, there's something about striving for the 21 and, once you achieve it, just maintaining and



staying balanced."

For the third exercise, I knelt and placed my hands on the top of my hamstrings. With my chin on my chest, I inhaled through my nostrils, arched my back as far as I could, then moved forward again while exhaling.

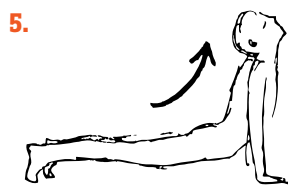
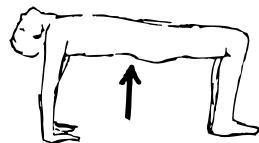
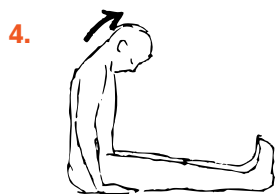
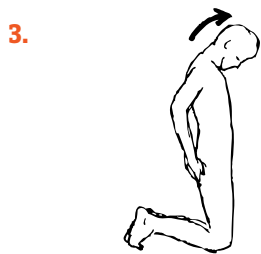
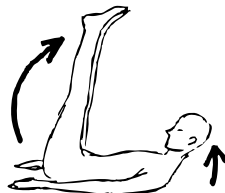
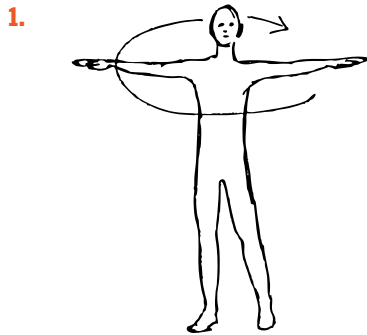
The fourth Tibetan started from a seated position, with my legs in front of me at hip length and my hands palm down at my hips (farther forward than with the traditional Table Top pose in yoga). As I inhaled, I raised my hips, bent my knees and dropped my head back to form a straight surface with my body *without moving* my hands or feet.

The last exercise started with supporting myself on the balls of my feet and palms of my hand, with the torso and face upward, as in the cobra position, but with the body off the ground. Then Cozzarin had me inhale and raise my butt so that I formed the triangle you see in Downward Facing Dog pose. Yep, repeat up to 21 times.

Cozzarin has been doing the Tibetans religiously since the mid-90s when her teacher, a legendary yoga instructor in the New York area named Mary Karis, brought into class an article published in *Yoga Journal* by Christopher S. Kilham (see sidebar). It's a whole body workout that can be done in a short amount of time (about 15 minutes) and in a small space.

"One of the things that Mary always impressed upon me is 'if you can do it today, you can do it tomorrow, and if you can do it tomorrow, you can do it always,'" Cozzarin says.

Not a bad code to live altogether. ■



Five Tibetans were originally known as *The Five Rites of Rejuvenation*, the title of a book published by Peter Kelder in 1939 that most recently was reissued as *Ancient Secret of the Fountain of Youth*. Kelder writes that he learned the exercises from someone who had been taught them by Tibetan lamas in the Himalayas.

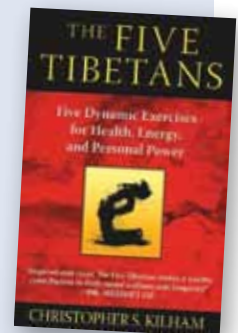
The exercises have gained wide acceptance as the Five Tibetans since Christopher S. Kilham first published *The Five Tibetans* in 1994. In September 2011, it was reissued with a new introduction. It has been published in 20 languages.

Kilham was first handed Kelder's book at a retreat center in 1976, and the five exercises have been part of his daily two-hour yoga practice—and other athletic endeavors—since then. He changed the title of the routine for his own 82-page volume, he reveals, because he thought the original one “sounded a little cornball.” He’s also a bit skeptical of Kelder’s claim that they are a virtual fountain of youth but, he says, “they do in fact greatly increase strength, energy and mental alertness.”

Kilham’s main modification to Kelder’s directives is the addition of a chapter on three types of diaphragmatic breathing that can be used both in day-to-day activities and in performing the exercises.

A Google search will reveal several illustrated articles and videos demonstrating the Five Tibetan technique as well as discussion groups. Other authors offer more radical modifications. In *Your Hands Can Heal You*, Stephen Co and Eric Robins present a variation of each exercise that not only is easier to perform, they claim, but also is more effective than the original.

If you are at all interested in the energetic foundations of the exercises, as well as ways to expand your access to the *kundalini* energy that they tap into, I highly recommend Kilham’s concise and clearly written volume.



Illustrations by Audrey Cozzarin.

Download the one-page

instruction sheet at http://peaceand-healthcafe.com/THE_FIVE_TIBETANS.pdf

