

Reflections on a Kum Nye Tibetan Yoga Retreat

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This year I attended a two-week Kum Nye intensive at the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, California. The retreat was a chance for healing and rejuvenation. With delicious vegetarian food, plenty of sleep and a schedule of daily classes, I was able to slow down and pay attention to my own feelings and needs.

Kum Nye (Tibetan Yoga) is a powerful vehicle for getting in touch with one's inner life and cultivating a positive state of being. It uses breath and awareness to show us how to go within and enliven what is stagnant, release what is negative and increase what is positive. The retreat was based on practices from the original Kum Nye Relaxation books, and also Tarthang Tulku's new book, *The Joy of Being*.

The movement, breathing and sitting practices of Kum Nye are designed to connect the practitioner with their inner experience. Once we are feeling what's inside, Kum Nye helps us melt away blockages and fill up with nurturing positive energy. It is easier than you might think to do this – it happens just by slowing down, tuning into the breath and taking awareness inside the body.

Each person's experience will be different, depending on their individual mental and physical patterns. An area of injury or tension will start to open and may bring forth feelings, memories, and ultimately a new sense of relaxation. The word 'relaxation' seems inadequate to describe the pervasive, open feeling of joy that can develop after deep release of this kind.

The method of breathing in Kum Nye is through nose and mouth at the same time. This enables us to connect simultaneously to the mind and the body. Awareness is an essential ingredient, and is applied by simply paying attention to whatever we notice in our field of experience, including thoughts, feelings, sensations and energy. In Kum Nye we are asked to observe our inner experience and let it be, without judgment or analysis.

Kum Nye uses very slow movements to tune us in to the energy inside us. It uses deep, easy breathing to mobilize this energy and help it flow around the body. To do this effectively, we must be prepared to feel the sensations which arise, whether these be warmth, pleasure, cold, tingling, tension, pain or some emotional state. This can be daunting at first, but the more we allow the sensations to flow, the more we find them transforming into energy itself, with no need for a label.

This process benefits the body by easing old tensions and allowing an expanded state of enjoyment and relaxation. The pace at which this occurs is up to each practitioner, as each person finds the right way for their body to move, breathe and rest. The approach we take is one of gentle kindness towards ourselves, breathing into the experience and allowing only what is comfortably manageable. This is important when dealing with areas of chronic pain or tension in the body, as only with patience will they begin to open up.

Kum Nye also benefits the mind, by leading us, in a natural way, to drop below the level of thinking into more open awareness. This is valuable for anyone like myself who has a busy mind. Over the two week retreat I gradually discovered greater compassion for myself and other people, along with greater acceptance of things as they are. Rather than trying to impose these qualities, I found them arising spontaneously out of the deep state of acceptance which I experienced.

We worked with expanding and enlivening the five senses (as well as the sixth sense, mind), and discovered new depth within sound, sight, feeling and taste. The Nyingma meditation garden was a great source of beauty, with its roses, trees and squirrels, and several times we undertook the slow walk or a vision practice out there in the sunshine.

As the pathway connecting the breath to deeper levels of the body becomes established, it becomes easier to use nose-and-mouth breathing to bring nourishing energy into the body. Over time, this strengthening base of inner peace promotes the capacity to experience deeper meditative states. Our body-mind eventually feels more integrated, and we develop a more spacious sense of ease and joy within.

Kum Nye takes perseverance and commitment, but you will get out of it according to what you put in. It is adaptable to whatever state in which you find your mind, body or life circumstances. If you are interested in exploring your inner world, it is a wonderful tool for healing and growth.