

The Little Book of
TIBETAN RITES
AND RITUALS

Simple Practices for Rejuvenating
the Mind, Body, and Spirit



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Chapter 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO TIBETAN BUDDHISM



*In a guest laden living room to the side in a corner,
I tried to wear a coat like skin,
And in that moment, that precise moment, I'm asked,
"Are you Tibetan?"*

—Chime Lama, "Tibetan-American Anxieties:
Wanting Sounds in a Barren Throat"¹

YOU ARE MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU KNOW

Approximately 13.8 billion years ago, the universe began with what's known as the Big Bang. The atoms created by that event would integrate into everything that exists today, big or small, including the human body. Within us are oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, sulphur, sodium, chlorine, and

magnesium—all of which came from a process called “galactic chemical evolution.”²

Many of the elements in our bodies were formed in stars over the course of billions of years and multiple star lifetimes—yet even though we are made of this “star stuff,” it can be easy in our modern world to forget how magical we truly are. Thankfully, we can pull upon ancient mindfulness traditions to create a sense of groundedness and to remind ourselves, as we adapt to an ever-evolving world, that we are indeed as powerful and expansive as the universe. One of these ancient traditions is a series of Five Tibetan Rites first brought to public awareness in a 1939 book by Peter Kelder titled *The Eye of Revelation*.

Kelder tells the story of a British explorer—Colonel Bradford—who had spent years searching for a secret paradise in the Himalayas. Tibetan lamas, considered spiritual leaders in Tibetan Buddhism, were said to maintain an unparalleled sense of health, vitality, and thriving. There’s not a lot you can find about who author Peter Kelder is. Some believe it’s a pseudonym. On Penguin Random House’s website under “About the Author” it says, “Well versed in the Tibetan Rites of Rejuvenation since the 1930s, Peter Kelder is alive and well, living in California. He is the author of *Ancient Secrets of the Fountain of Youth*.”

While similar to the yoga rituals that originated in India, the Five Tibetan Rites discovered by Colonel Bradford are notably different in that they’ve been dubbed “The Fountain of Youth.” This isn’t the mythical spring that restores the youth of anyone who drinks or bathes in its waters, mistakenly linked to Spanish explorer Ponce de



León and now a tourist attraction in St. Augustine, Florida.³ Instead, these Five Tibetan Rites—supposedly taught by lamas in a hidden monastery in Tibet—are a simple exercise system thought to bring health and rejuvenation.

This book will introduce the Five Tibetan Rites as they've been popularly taught, including modifications adapting them to a modern lifestyle, and offer an overview of selected traditional Tibetan philosophies, beliefs, and practices. It's important to note that because *your* body and *your* being are unique, your own experience with these Rites and rituals may vary from that of others.

Every effort has been made to be respectful of Tibetan traditions in order to honor a beautiful culture that has gone through tremendous challenges and injustices.

The Tibetan National Anthem states the following:

*By the spread of Buddha's teachings in the ten directions,
may everyone throughout the world
enjoy the glories of happiness and peace.*

May the pages that follow offer you a pathway in one of those directions.

DISCOVERY OF THE FIVE TIBETAN RITES

To date, versions of Peter Kelder's book have been translated into more than a dozen languages and sold millions of copies. In several

of these, you'll find page after page of testimonials from individuals of all ages, from all around the world, attesting to how the Rites have healed ailments, renewed vitality, and harmonized invisible energy within the body. The original book was revived in 1985 in an expanded and updated edition titled *Ancient Secret of the Fountain of Youth*, featuring a "Lost Chapter."

In this newer edition, Kelder shares that he was seated in a California park reading the afternoon paper when an elderly gentleman ("Colonel Bradford, as I shall call him—though it is not his real name") came to sit beside him. Appearing to be in his late 60s, gray and balding, Colonel Bradford revealed that he was a retired British Army officer who had also served in the diplomatic corps for the Crown and was therefore well traveled.

The two men developed a friendship, and over time it became apparent that Colonel Bradford had something important he wanted to share with Kelder—albeit reluctantly. So Kelder assured Colonel Bradford that he would keep any stories the Colonel shared in strict confidence. Ultimately, Colonel Bradford began to talk.

As Kelder recounts in his book, "While stationed in India some years ago, Colonel Bradford had from time to time come in contact with wandering natives from remote regions of the interior, and he had heard many fascinating stories of their life and customs. One strange tale...concerned a group of lamas, or Tibetan clerics, who, according to the story, had discovered the secret of eternal youth. For thousands of years, this extraordinary knowledge had been handed down by members of this particular sect. And though they

made no effort to conceal anything, the lamas were completely cut off from the outside world by vast, uninhabited mountain ranges.”⁴

It seemed that Colonel Bradford had become a little obsessed with discovering whether there really were old men who mysteriously regained their health, strength, and vitality after joining this monastery. Colonel Bradford asked Kelder to go with him to search for the “Fountain of Youth,” but Kelder declined, so the older man—with stooping posture and using a cane—left on his own in pursuit of this paradise on earth.

Years passed, and Kelder went on with his life. Then one day he received a letter from the Colonel. There was no return address, but the letter stated that Colonel Bradford felt he was on the verge of discovering what he’d been looking for! Months passed. A second letter arrived, and this time Bradford announced he had indeed found the “Fountain of Youth” and was getting ready to bring it back to the United States.

One night while Kelder was at home, his doorman announced that a Colonel Bradford was there to see him. It had been four years since their last encounter, so he excitedly told the doorman to send Colonel Bradford up. When the doorbell rang, Kelder threw the door open. Only he didn’t recognize the man standing in front of him. Rather than an older man with graying hair, here stood a tall young individual with thick, dark hair.

“Weren’t you expecting me?” the man asked.

It took Kelder a moment before he realized that this *was* the man who had gone away to the Himalayas! This was Colonel Bradford!

Kelder immediately began to pepper him with questions about what had happened since he'd left years ago. Colonel Bradford happily shared his story....

The moment Colonel Bradford had arrived in India, he had headed toward the Tibetan frontier. The Himalayas, as described later in this book, can be an unforgiving terrain with vast unmapped lands, so Bradford had a long journey ahead of him to find the legendary monastery.

But find it he did.

He met good-natured lamas who welcomed him in and dubbed him “The Ancient One.” They enveloped him into their practices, their culture, their food. Because Tibetan Buddhism is rooted in inner exploration, Bradford became less preoccupied with his physical appearance, until three months later he happened to catch sight of himself in a mirror and couldn't believe the transformation. It looked as though he had dropped 15 years from his age. From that point forward, everything continued to change so rapidly that even the lamas began to notice—and Colonel Bradford was no longer referred to as “The Ancient One.”

Since the publication of Peter Kelder's book in 1939, there have been skeptics who've said that the Five Tibetan Rites, supposedly more than 2,500 years old, are not actually authentic to Tibet. Some question the myriad health-benefit claims and whether Colonel Bradford actually existed, since little is known of Kelder. Even with these questions, there exists a similarity between the Five Tibetan Rites and authentic Tibetan *'phrul 'khor* yoga exercises. Proponents



assert that the Rites are a genuine form of *yantra yoga*—one of the oldest recorded systems of yoga in the world, originally taken from an authentic Indo-Tibetan tantric lineage.^{5, 6}

While modern culture has viewed tantra with a lens heavily focused on sex, it is actually an ancient Indian religious movement focused on the path toward enlightenment, one that seeks to harness a wide variety of experiences and energies in order to do so. Tantra practitioners believe that being guided by a teacher in esoteric practices—such as *mantra* (sacred words and phrases), *mudra* (ritualized sacred hand gestures), *mandalas* (diagrams of the universe)—can help you achieve “awakening” within just one lifetime. Tantra literally means “thread” or “loom”; you are weaving together the strands of the sutras or basic forms of Buddhism scriptures.⁷

“THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE FIVE TIBETAN RITES” BY CAROLINDA WITT

Carolinda Witt has taught the Five Tibetan Rites to more than 45,000 people around the world over the past 21 years. Her method of learning the Rites is called T5T and incorporates natural, full breathing. The following is her take on both the controversy surrounding the origin of the Rites and their benefits.

I am often asked if the Five Tibetan Rites are real or if someone has made them up. Despite having carried out a vast amount of research, I have been unable to find a definitive source to prove their authenticity, age, or origins.

Twenty-one years ago, I read the original 1939 book, *The Eye of Revelation*, and was totally entranced. I wanted to share them with others and have never tired of hearing people describe the great benefits they have received. But, it was my own experience of practicing the Rites that convinced me they worked—and I have not shifted from this viewpoint to this day. For me, this is proof that the Rites are authentic.

However, let's dig into the past a bit:

The Eye of Revelation's publishers claim the Rites are “25 centuries” (479 BC) old. This places them during the lifetime of Buddha (around the 5th to 4th century BC), who traveled throughout the fertile Indus-Ganga Plains teaching meditation practices and guidelines for attaining enlightenment—in other words, yoga practices as we understand them today: the cross-legged posture (*asana*) for meditation, contemplation of the breath (*pranayama*), meditation (*dhyana*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyahara*), and the ethical guidelines (restraints and observances) of the *yamas* and *niyamas* with the goal of attaining *samadhi* (bliss).

I am not an expert on Tibetan Buddhism, but in broad terms, Tibetan Buddhism evolved from the later stages of Indian Buddhism and incorporated various indigenous Tibetan practices. Bön, the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet, is similar to Tibetan Buddhism, although technical terms and viewpoints are explained differently. Controversy about which religion influenced the other remains uncertain, but what is unique to early Bön is a strong belief in the afterlife, particularly the in-between state and the use of animal sacrifice.⁸

Records from this period are scarce but well documented, and there is no mention of the Rites. The primary method of sharing knowledge was oral—traditionally passed from master to student, which means we have little chance of discovering the Rites’ elusive history. This is further compounded by the Chinese Communist regime’s invasion of Tibet in 1950, when they ransacked and destroyed 97 percent of Tibet’s monasteries. Sadly, so many ancient religious texts have been lost forever.⁹

Perhaps the source of the Rites is more recent?

From the scans of a rare copy of the 1939 *Eye of Revelation* and the equally rare 1946 updated edition—I have literally picked both versions apart, looking for clues. I took into account four perspectives: the publisher’s, the author’s, the story as told by the protagonist, and the lamas’ teachings as relayed by the protagonist, Colonel Bradford.

Let’s start with the author, Peter Kelder.

Is this his real name, or is it made up? So far, the only thing we know about Kelder is that he registered the copyright for his 1939 and 1946 versions of his book and that his publisher was based in Burbank, California. Some people believe Peter Kelder was a pseudonym for James Hilton, the author of *Lost Horizon*, which was published in 1933 and made into a film by Frank Capra in 1937. Hilton’s book is best remembered as the origin of Shangri-La, a fictional utopian lamasery located high in the mountains of Tibet. But why would Hilton need to write a second book linked to his fictional account in someone else’s name? Why not simply use his own?

I believe the skepticism over Kelder's name is due to the story's protagonist using a pseudonym, Colonel Bradford. This and Bradford's incorrect statement that the dervishes spin clockwise, when in fact, they spin counter-clockwise. Bradford refers to the dervishes as the Mawlawiyah [sic], a 13th-century fraternity of Sufis (Muslim mystics) founded by the Persian Sufi poet Rūmī (d. 1273).¹⁰ Could their spinning have been the inspiration for Rite No 1—The Spin—or is it from somewhere else entirely? If the Rites are from a later period than the publishers stated in *The Eye of Revelation*, then the search continues.

Are the benefits claimed for practicing the Rites real?

Some extraordinary claims have been made for practicing the Rites, and some of them are genuine. However, some highly exaggerated claims made by some unscrupulous internet marketers and a few people seeking to build a mystical reputation for themselves exist: “Throw your glasses away; your wrinkles will all disappear,” and so on.

Unfortunately, this has tarnished the Rites' reputation, led to unrealistic expectations of improvements in health and physical appearance, and the inevitable disappointments. Written in the glowing language of the time, *The Eye of Revelation* has contributed to this skepticism by making statements like “even his hair, which had grown back, held no trace of gray.” In all of my years of teaching, I have never seen people's hair turn dark again, and neither have any of my students reported it.

I believe this statement about hair darkening and the suggestion to rub fresh unsalted butter onto the scalp to make it grow is not part of the lamas' instructions to Colonel Bradford and was added by the publisher. Tibetan monks remove all the hair from their heads and are intentionally bald.

Yes, there *are* genuine benefits from practicing the Rites, a list of which appears on my website.¹¹ Benefits include an increase in energy, strength, flexibility, vitality, mental clarity, and well-being. I compiled these from students' workshop feedback forms and from people who have written in and shared their experiences. There are also some minor detox effects, also listed on my website, that people can experience temporarily. These include headaches, runny noses, slight nausea, initial fatigue, and so on. Most people view these as proof that the Rites are working.

To sum up: I believe the movements themselves produce similar benefits for most people. However, the degree to which they experience these benefits is very different. Some experience a great deal of change, others less so, and some don't notice much at all, except a 'knowing' or a feeling that the Rites are good for them. These benefits won't change even if we do find out where the Rites come from (or not).

Is it OK to modify the Rites to suit your individual needs?

The instructions on how to perform the Rites in *The Eye of Revelation* are minimal. That's part of their charm, but most beginners will require more in-depth instruction and perhaps modifications. We