Third Principle: Exercise Rules!

PHOTO HERE WITH CAPTION ‘WALK THIS WAY!

Not surprisingly, studies show that long term weight loss is much more likely when combined with long term, (forever) exercise. What does come as a surprise is the amount of activity/exercise mentioned. Wait for it… 1 hour and twenty minutes per day, adding up of course to over 9 hours per week. What an exhausting thought is that! Makes you want to take a rest doesn't it? But before you close this book in horror I am going to convince you that this is possible.

 First of all understand that the general pattern of weight loss, involves a fall in the metabolism, a weight loss” plateau.'' Exercise then becomes crucial in riding the gap until metabolism readjusts. Then, to sustain the weight loss, it is important to continue exercising. For many the plateau is the, ‘as good as it gets’, point. The drop is temporary. Don’t give up! Also note the word ‘activity,’ used in conjunction with the word ‘exercise.’ Activity basically means, not sitting or sleeping and provided we are not standing in a state of frozen catatonia, we must be active. This then puts the conditional value of one hour and twenty minutes in a new light. It becomes a do-able.

 More importantly exercise combined with good nutrition and portion control will greatly improve the odds of sustaining weight loss, with the added bonus of improved energy levels, stress reduction, improved cardio-vascular strength, improved muscle tone etc., Benefits which, would take more than one book to fully explain. And given that activity also counts as exercise, why not build it into your day in a constructive manner? Multi-task! Take over the window cleaner’s job, mow the lawn, walk to the shops – movement is movement!

 “ think like an athlete, then you’ll become one.”(me)

Sadly there are people who have no memory or concept of what it feels like to feel fit, to enjoy the freedom of the body and in such cases words are insufficient to convey how it feels to feel free. Where then may be found the ‘hook,’ or desire to return to a freedom that is unknown? And this is what carrying excess weight does, it incarcerates, just as effectively as any jail. This state of incarceration is applying to more and more young people because of a synthetic pressurised battery hen existence of study, computers, snacks and phones. If you put a hen in a tiny cage, as opposed to allowing it to roam free in the sunshine, it will become a weakened organism. Its bones will soften, muscle tone will be poor and if you feed it enough, it will also grow fat. The same principle applies right across the animal kingdom. In zoos, it is also painfully obvious on a mental level. Animals will develop neurosis with unnatural incarceration. What is so different about us?

Choices: Entrapment or Enlightenment

As a Yoga teacher, I see young people who appear to lack the flexibility, core strength, balance and posture of the older generations, standing before me. They are seemingly having to play ‘catch up,’ with an older generation and this is an extremely disturbing sight to witness. This ‘memory,’ of how it feels to be fit is important because it acts as a sort of bench mark, it is our re-set point. Where there is no memory of how it feels to have the freedom of the body, then how is a person to understand what is missing? How is being stuck in an over- weight body to feel uncomfortable if that is all that has been known?

 I have my own fitness ‘bench mark,’ and I used it quite deliberately to regain lost fitness levels when I was in my late forties. I remember when I was approximately fifteen years old running down the lane, where I was brought up, at some unearthly hour of the morning to meet my father with whom I worked. The lane was a long one, perhaps almost a mile and because I was invariably late I was obliged to run and that sensation, the joy of freedom in the early morning sunshine has stayed with me for over forty years. I can return back to that feeling in my mind whenever I choose and sometimes, when I am practicing yoga, I can catch glimpses of it.

 More than that, my definition of freedom is coloured by that memory and the sheer need to have a vehicle (body) that is as near capable of emulating that feeling as possible. I was also brought up within a generation who posessed the freedom to roam, ride bikes anywhere, climb trees, build dens etc. What does this mean for children who pacify themselves with TV’s and computer games? We know that what we fail to use becomes flaccid and possibly in time, obsolete. But what does this also tell us about state of mind? This of course is a larger generational picture and one that we may as well draw into our consciousness. Do we allow it to happen and if so when will pay back time be? Will it be say, in fifteen years with type 2 diabetes, or will it be high blood pressure in four years. Or will pay back time be in the currency of mental health problems. It’s like gambling. Isn’t it? We can only begin with ourselves and hope to entrain those around us.

Imagine your fitness ‘bench-mark.’

 If you do not have a clear memory of how it feels to be totally alive within your body, then imagine it. Make it clear and step into that image as if it were now. See yourself using your body freely and easily in the way it was meant to be used, dancing, running, walking, gardening; anything at all, which comprises of movement in the fresh air. Hold fast to the feeling you conjure up in your imagination and return back to it frequently. That is your ‘benchmark,’ of fitness. It will eventually sink into your subconscious and act as a point of return, if you venture too far off your benchmark limits.

The best time to exercise is before you get out of bed – it takes less than two minutes

No, I am not joking and for two reasons. The first is that if you flex the joints before you leave your bed, they will all have been worked on that particular day and therefore flexibility is maintained. Flexing the joints is also important for energy flow and it is energy flow (circulation) that keeps us fit and healthy in body and mind. Secondly, moving before we even get out of bed helps to put us in an exercise mind-set, it is a reminder to move.

 How…

 Start at the bottom of your body and work your way up, stretching bending and flexing in any way imaginable. Flex the ankles backwards and forwards before rotating each way. Now bend the knees a few times and with the knee still bent, stir in both directions, holding on to them as you massage the back.

 Sitting up, practice an exaggerated yawn, by lifting and stretching the crossed elbows up and out, as if removing a jumper. Now taking the arms out in line with the shoulders rotate the arms backwards and forwards, particularly emphasising rotation of the wrist. Now bend the elbows and draw in with the arms. Clench the fists and then release with the bent elbow flicking energy out (mindful of anybody next to you!). Rotate the head, by looking over the shoulder one way, before taking chin down to chest and then looking over the shoulder the other way.

**The next best time to exercise is before eating.**

 A British study conducted by Dr. Jason Gill at Glasgow University found that exercise before breakfast (in a fasted state) uses up 33 per cent more fat than exercising after eating. This is because exercise on an empty stomach forces the body to use up its stored fat for energy, rather than the energy from recently consumed food. The reality is that we rarely use energy from our fat stores. We read hunger as the red light, rather than the amber and therefore we may exercise away what we have recently eaten, only to feel hunger again soon afterwards. To break this cycle, occasionally eat a combined breakfast/lunch and exercise before that first meal.

The traditional advice is that breakfast is a must, in order to kick start the metabolism, however, exercise also kick starts the metabolism. Then, approximately twenty minutes or so, after your morning work-out, it is advisable to eat a small portion of protein for muscle building purposes, as a part of a combined breakfast/lunch. Either way all exercise, at any time, is hugely beneficial and besides, losing weight is not a race, slow is good.

 No Excuses

 Exercise is habit. Habits can be acquired and exercise is the best addiction ever. If you have a muscular or joint problem, exercise around that problem, this will also help to strengthen the problem area. Understand that we have over 640 muscles therefore there is always something to go at and perhaps the best example of this way of thinking is along the lines of the Paralympic Games – so no excuses! In fact I used to teach seated Yoga at a rest home. Admittedly, some of the resident’s would fall asleep but the fact remains, when awake, anybody can exercise.

 And, to help matters even further, fate intervened in the nick of time and Zumba/Salsa etc. was invented! Indeed was there ever a greater palate of exercise available? The choice is yours from Nordic walking, dance classes, aerobics etc.. There is also the option of reversing the sedentary downside of computers by using Wii-Fit, You Tube etc. to move. Try connecting your computer to the TV, and you will find a whole palate of classes at your disposal. Best of all are outdoor activities, particularly walking and gardening, two forms of exercise, which are both aerobic and anaerobic.

 Or to put matters into perspective, any type of movement is far better than no movement at all. If we choose to move in a faster, sustained manner then we exercise the heart and the lungs. We then place greater energy ‘fat burning,’ demands upon the body as we lift metabolism during the course of the exercise and there will also be a latency period when metabolism will still be raised after the exercise has ended.

No going for “the burn”

 Because aerobic exercise is oxidising, it is a form of exercise that is best carried out in a time efficient manner. And, as studies have shown short periods of intensive exercise,( excellent for stamina and endurance), followed by rest are in fact more effective than long periods of intensive exercise. These short bursts of exercise, to the extent that the heart rate lifts and the breath quickens, may be fitted into two minute time slots and need be practiced only 2 or 3 times per day. The rest of your exercise quota can either be functional (gardening etc.) or fun (cycling, yoga etc.)

In this way aerobic exercise is taken in small but regular doses. An intensive burst of exercise at week-end or even in the evening does not make up for hours of sitting. This does not work on two counts. First of all long bouts of sustained aerobic exercise is degenerative, it is counter- productive. Also it is not a good idea to sit for long periods of time because this is not how we are adapted to function. In fact chairs with backs are a fairly recently invention (16th century) and a causative factor for bad backs. Think about this when you are sitting comfortably. Then don’t. Sitting lends itself to poor circulation, poor posture, joint problems, poor muscle tone, stress and more. It is weakening. Therefore after an hour of sitting, find an excuse, if you are working, to move about. Wriggling is good.

Consider also, how to fit your exercise quota into your daily life. Imagine for instance that you are waiting for the kettle to boil. What do you do? I would suggest that now is a good time to practice the Tibetan 5 Rites in an aerobic manner (just 2 minutes), which I will explain in detail at the end of this section. Expending energy in short bursts like this also makes more sense if you are adrenalized because you can use aerobic exercise as a release valve. Therefore to work the fat burning capacity of adrenaline is also to reduce stress. Besides, adrenaline will not wait for you to pull the plug on it. Adrenaline has its own agenda and stress (toxic adrenaline) is linked with weight gain. In other words, it’s great to Zumba on a Saturday morning but ideally, give your heart/lungs a work-out every day, even if it’s brief.

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 Lift Your Resting Metabolic Rate

 To lift your resting metabolic rate you need to …lift. Our muscles need work. Consider also what happens to your body if you simply lose weight. Yes, you may well be thinner but without adequate muscle that shape will not be as easy to maintain. Conversely building muscle also defines the shape and is a far more attractive look than gaunt. It signified fitness. Sufficient muscle also helps to iron out the appearance of loose skin in a natural manner. Consider also that muscle is our power plant and the more turbines you have then the more energy you will burn.

Better still, this exercise enhanced muscle power plant burns energy all of the time, it does not switch off and therefore if you build muscle you have a better chance of sustaining weight loss. To achieve this it is not necessary to go and lift weight at a gym, unless you prefer to. In fact what could be easier than dumb bells at the side of the sofa – turn the TV intervals into an exercise session with the added satisfaction of making everybody else in the room look lazy… and possibly a little annoyed by the distraction. Invest in a cradle to work the core, they cost little and again, take up hardly any space. A win, win situation!

 Better still lift your own body weight. Our own body is the best piece of weight bearing kit invented. Its possibilities and permutations are endless. When we lift an arm we are doing just that, lifting and so we build muscle. Now, when we start to shift weight in various ways; using in my own case Yoga, our whole body acts as a system of weights and pulleys. Remember that we have 640 muscles and while the repetitive effects of lifting with a weight machine is far better than nothing, the effect of varied weight bearing exercise will target a far greater number of muscles.

The beauty of this also is that we achieve balance and symmetry in our shape. Muscles become long and toned rather than over-emphasised. Think about the fluidity of Michael Angelo’s art as opposed to the bulk of a body builder. Real strength and sheer well ness is the ability to flex and move, fitness beyond thinness. Energy is stored in the muscle and then flexibility enables us to release it. This can also be seen in the way we move and stand. Think about the tensile strength of steel cables as opposed to the bulk of iron. Our health lies in good muscle tone, the ability to store energy and then to let fly with it. This of course all adds up to looking good, which is something the celebs have sussed out, generally using Yoga to achieve it.

Weights – How much and how often?

If we are moving, rather than sitting then we are naturally lifting weight and burning energy in our everyday lives. However, Yoga is an excellent all-round form of exercise, which naturally focuses upon working muscle. And if you want to understand how Yoga works, by enabling you to lift your own body weight, but are unable to attend a class, then visit my website, [www.howdoyoulikeyouryoga.com](http://www.howdoyoulikeyouryoga.com).

 Remember that when you begin to lift your body only ever work into an edge of discomfort. If pain occurs then you are affecting ligaments and tendons, which have only a 4% stretch in them. Overt discomfort or muscles shaking means that you are over-working and this will create muscular tension, which is the opposite of what is needed. The mind needs to be convinced that working muscle is an excellent idea and therefore try to always stay relaxed and composed as you work out. Having said that, it may be that your muscles will ache after exercise and I would recommend a bath using Epsom Salts. Conversely this aching (not pain) is a good sign. Muscle regenerates by re- building and this is what you are experiencing the building of a new you.

Having said that ..

If you are lifting your own body weight via yoga, and the extent of this will depend upon your actual body weight and muscle strength, it is wise to give yourself rest time. It is best to intersperse exercise types. For example lifting weight on one day and then perhaps building muscle in a more generalised manner by walking/swimming on the next.

Here I go again about Muscle….

I make no excuses for banging on about muscle because with it we stay young and without it we age. Indeed there are many examples of over-weight people out there who are fitter than thin de-muscled individuals. If weight is lost to reveal good muscle tone and shape, this implies several primal innate messages involving health, fitness and fertility. Muscle equates deep within our psyche to youth, which it is. This material, the meat that makes us, impacts on posture, shape, strength, balance and energy. In other words more muscle means more collateral in the Bank of Well Being.

Added Incentives

 Because we know that muscle grows to meet its set task, we can use that knowledge to shape the body we wish to acquire. As an added incentive, when we retain and build muscle we also protect the joints, helping to avoid such problems as back and shoulder pain, sciatica etc. And, as mentioned, when we work muscle with weight bearing exercise, we also strengthen the bone. This 'win win' situation can be encouraged simply by walking. Furthermore a brisk walk in the fresh air will work that other important muscle, the heart and also the lungs, besides encouraging up-take of Vitamin D through sun light.

 Armchair atrophy

The opposite of course also applies with the old adage of 'use it or lose it,' saying it all. When our muscles are not used in the way nature intended they eventually deflate (atrophy) like disused tyres because the mind/body is saying, ‘My efforts to maintain this body part are no longer required', until eventually a different kind of tyre develops. This is because ageing alters the body's muscle to fat ratio, and when muscle is lost we tend to gain weight because it is the muscle that burns food as fuel. If we are eating the same amount of food, and atrophy by armchair encourages hunger, then the excess will be stored as fat. The fact is therefore, as we age, we are unable to eat the same amount as when we were young because our metabolism (muscle declines) and this is a common cause of weight gain.

 According to Brent Agin MD we begin to morph at the scarily young age of 25 years . After the age of 40, individuals lose one per cent of their muscle mass per year. This process, sarcopaenia, is a word of Greek origin, meaning 'poverty of the flesh', leading to a consequential loss of energy, agility, balance and strength. On the other hand retention and building of muscle mass is anti-ageing because weight bearing exercise improves muscle tone. Also, when muscle is built, energy levels are lifted because muscle fibre is mitochondria rich. The mitochondria, our energy power plants, transform the glucose from our diet into energy and therefore the more mitochondria we have, the more energy we have to fuel our bodily processes. This means that when we build muscle via weight bearing exercise and a healthy diet, we place a healthy deposit into our energy bank.

 Turning back the fitness clock is a very realistic proposition.

**It's Never Too Late To Renovate!**

 Nature's intelligence has given us a regain option in the form of weight bearing exercise, That is to say we can age hard or soft and studies have shown that it is possible to reverse sarcopaenia (muscle wastage) either totally or partially. Consider this, at the Centre on Ageing at Tufts University, Boston, US, people in their 70s, 80s and 90s, took part in a 10 week training programme that enabled them to double their muscle strength.

The above study is an extreme example involving elderly people but it just goes to show that if they can do it… Bear in mind also, that apart from the energy/looks advantage, building muscle is an extremely important component of keeping the body at a healthy weight because, as mentioned in Part 2, muscle mass correlates to how fast we burn energy when we are doing nothing at all and this allowing for the hours that we sleep, may take up half of our day or more.

 **Press the ‘shift’ key. Don’t just sit there!**

If you are obliged to sit because of your job then get up and walk at regular intervals and become hyper helpful with coffee making etc. Come what may, walk during your lunch hour. It might be encouraging for you to wear a pedometer, so that walking takes on the nature of a challenge. To encourage this remember that besides muscle wastage, prolonged sitting tends to encourage a C curve to develop at the upper back as our spine gives way to gravity, encouraged by leaning towards a desk use etc. In short, we are designed to move and sitting encourages stagnation of our circulatory system, part of a wider picture of how we can speed up our built in obsolescence if we allow ourselves to decline into a flat human battery because of disuse.

Studies have also shown that short bursts of the kind of intense exercise we have discussed, the kind that uses groups of muscles rather than isolated muscle also serves to release Growth Hormone. This type of compound exercise (using many muscles), interspersed with periods of rest is also typical of some of the more vigorous Yoga forms.

It is also the method/routine of circuit training. In this manner you can make a little time go a long way exercise wise. For example simply doing housework, interspersed with short bouts of vigorous exercise, typically squats and tricep lifts, are an ideal way to work the body. These short bursts should speed up your heart rate leaving you slightly breathless, and as you progress, you will find that your return to baseline heart rate takes place in a shorter time. For example, here am I writing this piece. I put the computer to one side and I stand. I move into just two yoga postures, which entail lifting my own body weight. The two postures are Down-Dog (making an inverted V shape of the body by placing hands to ground and lifting hips into the air( into Up-Dog (lowering the body down and lifting the head). This is also Tibetan Rite number 5, instructions for which are given at the end of Part 3. A couple of minutes of this sends my heart racing and speeds up the breath. I have worked muscle, joints (including spinal vertebrae) and cardio-vascular system. I have temporarily raised my metabolic rate and by lifting weight and building muscle, I ultimately help to lift my resting metabolic rate. I also know that when I exercise like this with full focus I clear the mind. And more than that, when I practice Down Dog, I am also stimulating the thyroid gland.

To look at this from an evolutionary point of view, we can surmise that for Stone Age man, hunting would have entailed short energy bursts, periods of rest and then periods of sustained moderate activity such as when gathering vegetation, wood for fires etc. What he would **not** have been doing, would have been sitting looking at an object at table height with his spine bent like a question mark.

Desk Bound?

According to ? Director of the Natural Science Museum, the future is the tread mill desk. He has placed his computer work station on top of the console portion of a tread mill. This says, ?provides not only sustained exercise at work but a definite psychological advantage when anyone enters the room, given that he is now automatically taller than everybody else!

So above All Think Tall! (The Importance of Posture)

Keeping muscle strong and toned also helps to hold the spine in the optimal position nature intended it to be. Upright! Weak muscles on the other hand pre-dispose to poor posture because muscle supports the spine. This is so important because your posture is also a clue to your state of mind, as well as potentially impacting upon joints and muscles, as they struggle to compensate for structural imbalance. In fact, according to a study by Brian Meier, a psychologist at North Dakota State University when you think down you do indeed look down and the reverse also applies. This again, has implications for how long we spend sitting down. There is a Yoga posture (there always is!), called Staff. The word ‘staff,’ describes how we need to hold the spine. Sitting in a chair in the Staff posture, means locating the sitting bones. These bones are at the tops of the long thigh bones, they are the knobbly bits and they take our weight. We tend to sit on the lower spine, which encourages the body to collapse forward like a sack of potatoes, which of course is the opposite of our intended end game. To reform the body, and I am including good posture and muscle tone with weight loss, there is no time off for good behaviour. It is 24:7 and the truth is that once habits have changed, there is no going back. You would not want them to because poor posture then becomes highly uncomfortable.

 Leaning Tower of Pisa or Eiffel Tower?

Besides standing and sitting tall is an excellent form of instant weight loss and breast uplift combined. The reasons for this are that when we open the chest wide like a book, lengthen with the spine and draw back and down with the shoulders, we have instant up-lift. We defy gravity! Focus on pectoral exercise for this to achieve maximum effect. Super models stand and walk like they do for good reason.

 So, if your posture is more Leaning Tower of Pisa than Eiffel Tower, take steps to realign. You can also help yourself by continually checking your alignment until your sub-conscious gets the message. Try looking sideways on in a mirror. Ankles, hips and shoulders should be in line, with the chin parallel to the floor and the ear central to the shoulder. When we look eyes down for long enough (computers again!), the muscles at the back of the neck are forced to work over-time to hold the weight of the head, which weighs the same as a bowling ball. This also, in time, causes a double chin to develop. Simply learning to stand and sit correctly will help to re-balance and therefore to strengthen all of the postural muscles. This is extremely important in the case of the core muscles and the other intricate layers of the back muscles, because the spine protects the central nervous system. Think about how a kink in an electricity cable may affect energy flow! And when we feel better, we look better and we exercise better.

The Science of Yoga

Yoga lends itself to weight control, because it is a root form of well-ness, of which optimum weight is a manifestation. It is also important for other reasons, including the fact that yoga focuses upon bodily alignment. Alignment in turn impacts upon our joints, which are ultimately responsible for how we move. But this is only the beginning . Recently I was asked at the beginning of one of my classes. ‘What is Yoga?’ the question, coming from a stranger to the practice.

 At the gym where I teach there is a palette of fitness classes ranging from Zumba to Spin, in a kind of rotating clock of whatever is new. In short, fitness fashion. There is nothing wrong with that, in fact there is everything right with it. Whatever it is that entices an individual to pursue fitness is good and I strongly believe that fitness should be flogged with as much zeal as soap powder. Where Procter and Gamble go, is definitely the way to go marketing wise. Except Yoga ought to sell itself because it is more than fitness. It is a life plan.

 Yoga encompasses an entire philosophy of wellness, which is why it has stood the test of time. Philosophy of course is not fact; however modern science is rapidly providing proof. New ‘discoveries,’ are being made that are not new at all. For example autogenic training as ‘discovered,’ in the 1970’s er, sorry thousands of years too late! This is a form of pranayama (breath control) and dhayana (self-withdrawal), two of the eight strands of Yoga. Indeed, Yogic understanding of psychology renders modern psychology niaeve, and at the same time unnecessarily complex. The beauty of Yoga lies in its simplicity, which makes it perfect as an adjunct to weight loss.

Many Forms Of Exercise In One

 To lose weight and to make the most of our physical potential it is advisable to:

\*Exercise aerobically (lifts metabolism temporarily – improves all round fitness levels)

 \*Exercise anaerobically (build muscle and lift resting metabolic rate)

 \*Improve stamina and endurance via aerobic and anaerobic exercise

 \*Improve posture

\*Increase flexibility and agility

 \*Improve circulation

\*Improve balance

\*Increase focus and concentration

 \*Improve the relaxation response (de-adrenalise)

Consider how many different exercise classes you would have to attend in order to achieve all of this. If you are fortunate enough to find the right Yoga class for you, then you have found a one stop shop. If this is not feasible, then focus initially upon strength building and aerobic exercise, in any manner that fits in with your life style or preferences. The rest will follow.

When you become fit, you free the energy, which Is latent inside yourself. When weight problems (a form of energetic stagnation) are eradicated, energy is then able to flow freely and this will affect every area of your life. The change will be more than what you will perceive in a mirror.

Finding a Yoga Class

You may have to shop around because there are many schools of Yoga. Some forms of Yoga encompass spirituality with movement while other forms of Yoga are purely physical. You will know what is right for you and you will know, which teacher is right for you. At the same time look up classes on You Tube, or any other form of Yoga that appeals and try to do a little every day. Whatever it is that you choose, set your stall out to work your body. Fix your intention and then go for it. Also, always bear in mind that this is not a race, it is a process.

 In fact the tortoise winning the hare approach is by far and away the best strategy because this is far less stressful for the body and so improves the odds for long term success. Learn to love exercise and build it into your life in the same manner that you brush your teeth every day. If, when you begin to exercise, you think this is too hard or that you are unable to do the same as everybody else, try to alter your mind set. Understand that it is the least fit or flexible who receive the most benefit from exercise. A person who is very fit will have to work far harder to achieve the same benefits. And If you do not feel comfortable within a particular class then find another one. It may be that particular teacher or class was not right for you or perhaps it was too far away or too much of a stress getting there. Look for other options such as DVD’s and make like a winner by setting small targets. The Tibetan Five Rites, practised slowly and mindfully is probably as good a start as any.

Here’s how

 The Tibetan Five Rites

The story goes that the 5 rites were discovered in the 1940’s by an ex American soldier who was travelling in the Himalayas. He discovered a hidden monastery of Buddhist Monks, with not a grey hair between them, despite their elderly years. They had discovered the fountain of youth. The soldier remained at the monastery for some years and during that time practised their age defying ritual: the five rites. On returning to America, the soldier met up with a long standing friend who was amazed by his youthful looks and if you wish to know more I would suggest you read the book entitled The Fountain Of Youth.

Besides going into some detail about the soldier, the book also outlines the ritualistic set of exercises, which is purported to hold back time. Because the Tibetan Five Rites are so popular, they can be found all over the internet with various groups and societies existing to spread the message. But I believe, the best advertisement for The Five Rites is Bruce Forsyth, who has apparently been practising the rites every day, since walking down the aisle with an ex Miss World, almost forty years his junior. He was given the book (by his mother-in-law) on the day of his wedding. As I write this book, he is eighty four years of age and still dancing the night away on prime time TV.

 The rites, other than the first rite, comprise a series of movements, which in themselves include several yoga postures, performed in a flowing sequence. They are each performed up to an optimum number of 21 times. Given then that several Yoga postures are involved within each of 4 movements and at their optimum the rites are performed to include 21x5 sets (105 sets), it is easy to understand, given the sheer range of movement within the rites, just what an efficient form of movement this is.

 The Five Rites, affect posture, balance, co-ordination, muscle tone and more. They can be performed as a slow moving meditative ritual, or they can be performed as a time-efficient aerobic exercise. The rites are also a superb way of monitoring your growing fitness levels. Remember there is no competition, but if you can perform say 15 rotations of Rite 1, followed by five sets of Rites 2 to 5, this then becomes your marker to beat. Then, when you have reached your optimum (anywhere up to 21), you may wish to keep a value of how long it takes you to perform the rites, or not, slow is just fine.

How To….

 Any instruction I give, needs to be further defined by demonstration, preferably live or try visiting- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjtslbrFbLY

Rite Number 1 –Make Like A Whirling Dervish

Standing in correct spinal alignment (breathe in to extend the spine and make as if a cord is drawing you upwards from the crown of the head), take the arms out to shoulder height and fix your eyes on a spot. Start to twirl round in a clock wise direction (Not anti-clockwise or it might age your over night!). Keep returning to the spot, and stopping at any sign of dizziness. With practice this becomes much easier. The Dervishes can twirl for hours on end.

Rite Number 2 - Lifting the weight of the upper body and the legs.

Lie in a prone position (back to the floor) legs straight out in front and the arms by the side. Then start to lift the upper body and legs together. Try to aim for the legs to lift at a right angle to the body, although this might be limited by tight ham strings. Arms also lift off the floor (keeping them parallel to the sides of the body), as the chest shoulders and head lifts up. Always engage the core before each movement, that is to say you draw the navel in towards the spine. When you pull in with the transversus abdominus, a corset of muscle below the navel, the rest of the core muscles are automatically switched on and this protects the back. Breathe in deep as you lift and exhale to come down. If you want to make this slightly harder pause at the end of the down movement, so that the extended legs remain a few centimetres from the ground, before raising with the arms again on the inhalation. Alternatively take them right down to the ground before the next movement.

Rite Number 3 – Bending forwards and backwards from a kneeling position

 Come into a kneeling posture with good spinal alignment. Hands are on the sides of the thighs. As You breath in, curl the shoulder girdle round and drop the chin down onto the chest and as you do so the hands automatically slide to the front of the thigh. Exhale as you move back into neutral and inhale again as you drop back, the hands moving this time behind the thigh as you take a gentle back bend. Keep strength in the back of the neck, don’t allow it to fall too far back. Feel as if you are hinging your body forwards and backwards, almost like a book opening (taking body back) and then partially closing as the body hinges forward. The main movement is coming from the hips, do not allow the thighs to fold too far forward.

Rite Number 4– Table top position

 This requires strength, therefore be patient with your-self. Seated on the ground with fingers pointed forwards, push yourself up into a table top position, with the stomach upwards and your core muscles engaged. Do not allow head to fall too far back, try to keep spinal alignment even in this position. Feet need to be beneath the hips and the hands beneath the shoulders. Caution if you have osteoporosis. Lift up on the in-breath. Then, on an ex-halation swing yourself back down by lifting the soles of the feet and using the heels as a hinge. Swing yourself back in between your arm, focussed upon taking full strength onto the wrists and hands, by swinging through the arms and then straightening up back into start position. Repeat in a flowing motion.

Rite Number 5 – Up Dog/Down Dog

Lying prone with the hands on either side of the shoulders, core engaged push the chest and shoulder girdle up. This is called the Cobra posture. Now, tucking the toes under, take strength in the legs and lift the hips up to full extension in that position, on an in-breath. Your body now ought to look like an upside down V shape. This is called Downward Dog. Head falls naturally between the hands. Now, on an exhalation swing yourself back into the original start position, (cobra) and then repeat. If you wish to make this harder hold the legs slightly off the floor. This posture then becomes Up Dog. Again, this is a strong lifting posture, which also requires stamina. Because it is a back extension, take particular care if there is any weakness in the back and always remember to engage the core muscles.

The Tibetan 5 Rites, also demonstrate the fact that you do not need actual weights, to lift weight, lifting the body is perfect. When we lift and move the body in as many permutations as possible, we are more likely to target deeper and lesser used muscles, than simply keeping to a routine of lifting dumb-bells etc.

 In my experience The Tibetan Five Rites, which were originally taught to me within a yoga class I attended, are both physically and mentally strengthening. They constitute a perfect blend of the best of Yoga. Also, they are simple to learn, do-able and adaptable, if you are not yet ready for a particular movement. But be aware that Rites 4 and 5 are particularly muscle strengthening. Optimally you would perform each movement only up to 21 times. Remember muscle needs to regenerate and it may be enough for you to practice Rites 4 and 5 every other day, because these are particularly powerful. It is also important to feel a sense of stillness, even within movement and that way, your mind will align itself with your body’s intention. Avoid injury by listening to your body and never, ever use strain.

Meditating At the Same Time – As Simple As That…

In the spirit of killing two birds at the same time, why not meditate as you exercise (more of which in Part 4). There is nothing magical and mysterious about meditation and studies overwhelmingly declare how good it is for us, both mentally and physically. So, fortify your exercise by simply focussing strong on what you are doing and not allowing your mind to wander. That is meditation, as simple as that. If outside thoughts come, then let them go and draw your mind back to the task in hand. Keep your focus strong upon what it is you are doing and you will amplify the effects of the exercise session both on a physical and a mental level. It will also make your practice safer, besides convincing the mind that this is a pleasant, relaxing thing to do. Which, of course, it is.