

PRISON PHOENIX TRUST

P.O. BOX 328, OXFORD, OX2 7HF

www.theppt.org.uk



Newsletter, Winter 2009

18 MONTHS To Go



A few days ago there was a chance to talk to a friend of David's in Cambodia, and by the miracle of webcam, watch her too as

the word up: endurance of hardship or provocation or pain or delay. Maybe all four at the same time. So

we spoke about her six months into a two year stretch as a nurse doing voluntary service overseas. It sounded a lot like the difficulties of a custodial sentence.

David is the PPT's technical wizard and his friend Katja trains local people to be nurses ministering to vast numbers of sick people in this region.

You could see by her gentle face how tough the conditions are in the sweltering heat of the afternoon. First, she has to cope with the wet, and right now, the floods are rising up the stilts her house is built on. Soon she may be leaving for work by boat. The weather is unpredictable. Recently 30 people died in a nearby typhoon.

"Many people are sick and all are very poor," she told us, as she added, "I've now reached my sixth month here," and it sounded like they have been long months struggling with a strange place and new language. Just like many thousand inmates who are finding themselves in UK jails from overseas.

We asked her what quality she is reaching for in herself to cope since she is only a quarter of the way through her work in the East. (A familiar situation to many of you in custody in hard conditions with long sentences ahead.) Katja says what she has found in herself is patience. I looked



Katja at home near the Mekong River.

as Christmas is just around the corner, it seems a good idea to share Katja's life with people who might understand and to ask for your prayers for her and her work. As a nurse in England she was a great supporter of the PPT's work and of prisoners.

It is a good time of year to think of brothers and sisters all over the world and those in the cell next door too. Learning to endure provocations and delays in prison takes a lot of patience. If this doesn't come naturally there is a time-honoured way to help it bloom in you, simply by sitting still and becoming conscious of your breathing. Try sitting and breathing naturally, in and out through the nose for half an hour. Not only does patience start rising to the surface, but it connects to something deeper too.

In the essential world of the universe, everything is here including men, young people and women all over the world and your cellmates next door who are serving time. So is Katja, the great heat, typhoons, patience, a summer's day and a birthday on Christmas Eve. When you meditate on silence and the breath in this realm, peace of mind can find you. May patience bring you a lighter heart this season.



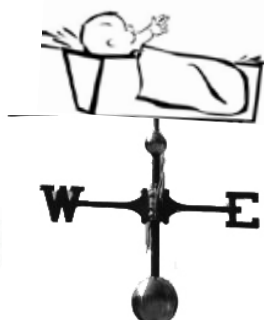
Love Sandy - and Jo, Jason, Sam, Kate, Kaye, Clive, & David

ABOUT THE PRISON PHOENIX TRUST

The Prison Phoenix Trust supports prisoners in their spiritual lives through meditation, yoga, silence and the breath. It recommends breath-focussed stretches sensitively tailored to students' needs which release long-held tension in the joints – and breathing techniques, relaxation and meditation. This safe practice offers students ultimate peace of mind, the goal of ancient yoga. The PPT encourages prisoners and prison staff through correspondence, books, newsletters, workshops and weekly classes. It trains and supports qualified yoga teachers in establishing and maintaining weekly classes in prisons and secure hospitals throughout the UK and Ireland, with workshops, courses and teaching resources.

“In the sky, there is no distinction of east and west”

- The Buddha (563 - 483 BC)



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Dazed and Confused



By Jason

Have you ever found yourself thinking that whatever you decide, you cannot win as far as the outcome is concerned? Everyone in prison will understand this dilemma. Everyone outside prison too.

On page 5 a friend writes of a situation facing him which led to disastrous consequences. He had to decide whether to pay a gang protection money to be safe or to contact the police and face a gang leader's threats. What was the right action? How should he act? What would you do?

Luckily most of the decisions facing us in our life are not usually so dramatic and threatening. But they still cause tremendous anxiety and indecision. It is a great relief then to learn that we do not have to try to solve every dilemma of this kind on our own.

Just leave the matter as it is in all its muddle and confusion and take time out to let it all go from your mind. Try focussing upon your breathing for ten minutes. Sit with an upright posture, solid and completely still. Concentrate upon the breath silently entering the nose, a short pause as the oxygen is absorbed, and finally a silent exhalation to let go and allow the stale air to be released. Continue for another ten minutes, with the mind totally focussed upon the breathing process.

Then later in the day do it again and once more before bedtime. People often say that when they exercise or go to the gym their worries lessen because they exhaust their bodies and minds at the same time. This helps them feel better. Exhausting the mind of all its jabber is a wonderful thing. Exhausting the mind of the problem of deciding what to do is the answer in itself. When we stop thinking as individuals and start tuning in to the great mind of the universe gradually the problem of deciding what to do disappears. Then without doing a thing, we find ourselves acting on what has been decided.

Accepting that there is never one answer can be incredibly hard for the thinking mind - all we can really do is act and see our life change, with no judgement of whether this is right or wrong. The brief moments of stillness we build into our lives in our meditation can allow something meaningful to be revealed. Perhaps your mind already feels exhausted by reading this article - it makes no sense; no real answers are arriving for you; what about right and wrong? Oh no - not meditation again.

Now stop... and sit and give yourself a break. Forget all that thinking for a while... and see what happens!



Envelope drawn by a patient in Ashworth Hospital



From HMP Highdown

I don't know how I would have coped with this whole nightmare without all your love and support! I say nightmare but in a way the episode has given me a chance to really find myself, for probably the first time in my life. Without this opportunity I wouldn't have had the space for the spiritual growth I've had, so perversely, I'm actually grateful for this time on my own. How mad is that? It's really given me a platform to go on from for the rest of my life.

Yesterday a person I hadn't seen for five months got moved onto my wing. He offered me some free heroin! - Which I turned down, much to his surprise and disappointment. A big change for me! It feels great to realise that that is no longer a part of me.

I've just learned I'm to be released in October - as soon as a probation hostel place becomes available, I'm off! I've discovered I'm not such a bad person after all - in fact I'm quite a good bloke.

From HMP The Mount

The CD *Clearing the Head, Relaxing the Body* which I received today, really helped; all I can say about it is WOW!

I've been suffering for weeks with a bad back but the exercises on the CD have done it wonders! The breathing exercises were out of this world and for the hour I was doing it, I wasn't in prison. I was free with Sam, Jane, Roland and Sandy. This is the most relaxed I've felt in a very long time and I'll be going back there each morning and night. I'll write again soon and let you know how I get on.

From HMP Winchester

Last time I wrote, I was talking about Enemies and love - and you asked if it's possible to show love to my enemies. This is what I do.

I breathe in and out, hard then soft, then light, then long for a while, then offer minutes of goodwill and love and peace to them, the prison and all the Universe. In my meditation I do the head-heart exercise, thinking of people in my heart, feeling well for them and sharing their pain and suffering.

On the wings, I have been trying to reach out to other prisoners. After some idle chat when I tell them my name we often end by shaking hands. Now sometimes they seek me out.

My meditation is much better. Although my mind seems very blank and there's nothing there for long periods of meditation, afterwards I feel more relaxed and at peace.

I no longer slander people or steal and I'm trying my hardest not to lie (very hard, in here.)

My fear has dropped. There's a bloke on the wing I'd been having trouble with. Well, I've been holding him in my heart and early today we even shared a joke and said hello with a positive smile. I can't believe the power of all this - it amazes



Letters

We are happy to reply to all your letters and help in any way we can with your yoga and meditation.

me more and more every day. Thank you for being there Jason, for helping me to lose paranoia and stay in the moment. I pray I keep this going on the outside in a month or so. I'm worried about that. Are there any retreats I could go to?



From an ex-prisoner, now in his own flat

As you can see I've got a flat, I've also got a job. My flat is kitted out already. Don't ask me how I've done all this; it's from up above, it's got to be. I've even got electric and gas and loads of food in my fridge and cupboards. I've started a new life...

It's midnight and I am up late because I've got tomorrow off work. I've painted my flat - it looks very nice. I do read my Bible still but some days I lose my faith or just can't be bothered but deep in my mind I feel bad about it. I've changed my life around and never have done as good as this ever. I even get calls in my spare time to go and cut people's hair and get paid for doing it!

I send a young girl in the Philippines £15 a month to pay for her education. Her name is Bernadette and she is very thankful for it. She is a good girl and it's a shame I can't help all the children in her village in Cavite. If I won the lottery I would.

Last week I was stood at a bus stop and this woman was asking people if they had 50p. Every person said "No" so I felt sorry for her and dipped my hand in my own pocket and gave her a pound. She was very grateful. Next thing I got my scratch card out - I don't usually buy them - scratched it and won £50! Ha Ha. A gift from God I think, hey?

I've been out three months now, done nothing bad and I'm usually back in prison by now doing a sentence. I'm going to church this Sunday. I need to say thank you to God for the help he has given me.

From HMP Wandsworth



It's 5 am Sunday morning and I've had another sleepless night. The medic forgot to give me my medication again last night. I want to be gradually weaned off it but that may take some time. The birds wake up about 4 am which is nice to hear.

Whenever I feel frightened of my life here in prison, I know I need to slow my thoughts and just be still and quiet. Then fear goes and I feel OK again because I'm placed back on my spiritual path of learning and understanding.

Sometimes none of this seems real, it's more like a dream I'm in. Perhaps that's just a coping strategy, but at least I now have no doubt that whatever my situation, it is the best thing for me right now and I really am grateful to God for helping me along my journey. I have opened my eyes to absorb what is around me

"I want to make sure they take the right path"

and those I share this part of my life with. I thank you, Anita, for that. You know, it's not as bad as I imagined, and when I start the day with kindness, good mornings and smiles, it really does come back. I am so fortunate to keep meeting really nice

From Wheatfield Prison



Iam just after finishing 45 minutes of meditation and feel great. I used to sit down and after a few minutes I would be very uneasy but I took your advice Stephen, about clearing my head of thoughts (well, I try to!) I stuck it out and have much more control over it now.

My sister dropped me in a book called *The Art of Happiness*, by the Dalai Lama. I would never have read anything like that but I just open my mind now and who doesn't want to be happy?

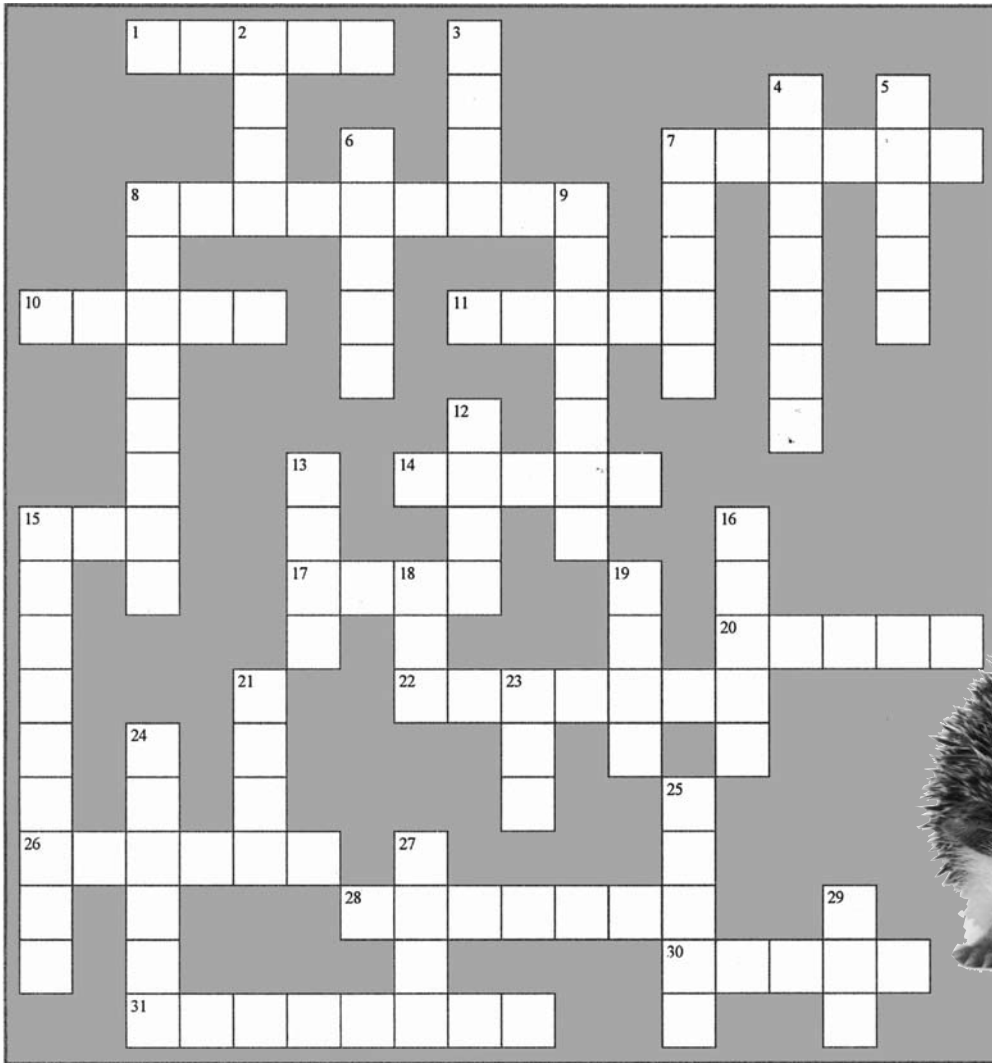
Sometimes I can wake up and say to myself is life worthwhile? But then I say it's always worthwhile. I have my own boy aged eleven and girl aged seven so I want to make sure they take the right path and learn from my mistakes. I am in one of those moods where everything seems good so I hope it can stay this way with more meditation, yoga, etc - and of course a letter from yourself.

From HMP Birmingham

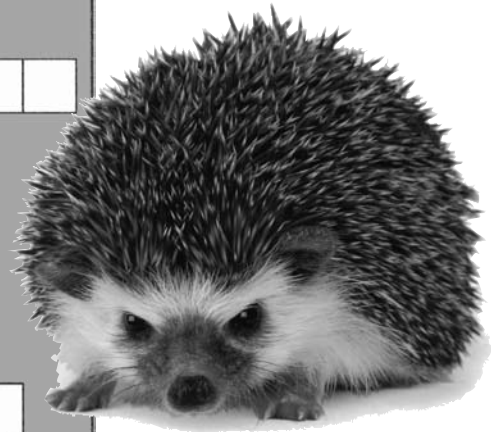


We're All Doing Time and the yoga CD have helped me inside prison and out. I used to be a heroin user but I've been clean now for three years.

I'm not saying the book kept me out of prison or off drugs but it definitely helped me; for example the stories in the book made me think about my own life. I still practise yoga. I am back in prison for something I did three and a half years ago. Well, at least I'll have a clean slate when I get out. I have three young children, aged four, three and 11 months, and not being with them makes me very stressed. Thank you for helping me through my tough times.



Got a pencil? Got a moment? Know the Nativity story? See how far you get with this seasonal puzzle before checking the answers on p.7. Maybe you and your cellmate can try it together?



So what *did* happen in Bethlehem??

Across

1 and 29 down: Sweet snack with pastry and fruit (5,3)

7: Something to decorate the Christmas tree (6)

8: They came to see the baby Jesus (9)

10: Paper hat worn at Christmas meal (5)

11: Traditional Christmas song (5)

14 & 5 down: Father Christmas (5,5)

15: *see 16 down*

17 & 20: There are five of these in a Christmas song (4,5)

22: Sparkle (7)

26: Shiny decoration (6)

28: Something to pull before a festive meal (7)

30: A bird often seen on Christmas cards (5)

31: Sleigh puller (8)

Down

2: Number of ladies dancing, in a Christmas song (4)

3 & 27 down: A partridge sits in this, in a Christmas song (4,4)

4: Traditional Christmas food, served with brandy butter (7)

5: *see 14 across*

6 & 21 & 15 across: They followed the star to Bethlehem (5,4,3)

7: They jingle! (5)

8: Children might hang one up on Christmas Eve (8)

9: Green vegetable often served with Christmas dinner (7)

12: Something to send to friends or family - with a greeting (4)

13: Ancient discipline which includes stretches, breath awareness and meditation (4)

15: Christmas plant - people kiss under it (9)

16 & 15 across: Robin Hood's gang (5,3)

18: Yule - - - ; a chocolate cake eaten at Christmas time (3)

19: A dried fruit (4)

21: *see 6*

23: Plant used for decorations (3)

24: The baby Jesus lay in one (6)

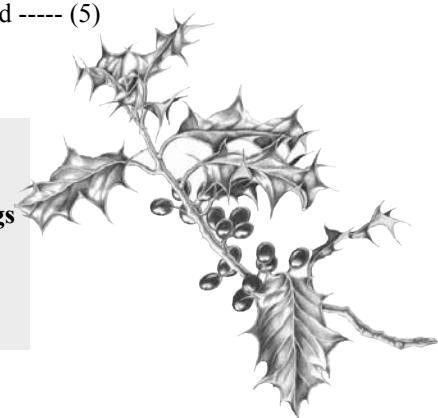
25: Gold, frankincense and ----- (5)

27: *see 3*

29: *see 1 across*

QUICK QUIZ

Send us a list of 10 things with prickles. We'll give a new year tenner for the best answer.



“The words went right through my defences like rain entering soil”

By an inmate of a prison in Sweden



During my time here in Sweden I have done a lot of reflecting on my life and like everyone, had high and low points, but the one thing that remains constant is loneliness.

But I only need to look at the books here in my cell to realise I do have friends and for that I feel a deep sense of gratitude towards the authors who shared their wisdom with me. They have given me a different perspective on life and the effect of the books on meditation and meditation itself is nothing less than transformational. Thank you for your continuous support over the years.

Let me explain how I got here. I am 34, married, was loved and loving, do not smoke, drink or use drugs, lived a conventional, comfortable life here in Sweden, hold an MA from the University of Stockholm and had set up my own business – a petrol station outside Stockholm. The business prospered and I was planning to expand it.

One day in 2002 a gang of foreigners turned up at my station and demanded a “fee”, as they put it, to guard my station against intrusions by other gangs. I refused and threatened to call the police. The gangsters retreated, warning me to “be careful”. Three days later my petrol station was burnt down and my employee gravely assaulted, sustaining life-threatening injuries.

Beside myself with anger

I was beside myself with anger. A rage was developing in me that drowned out any compassion or conscience. I eventually hired an assassin and ordered a murder of the leader of the gang who was a young man of 24. I and the assassin were subsequently arrested, tried and convicted.

Those first prison years were depressing but then I discovered *We're All Doing Time* by Bo Lozoff. The sections on self-control and karma spoke directly to me, and I began practising the meditation and hatha yoga every morning from 7.00

to 8.00 am. The meditation was at times frustrating, but what kept me going were the brief moments of peace and clarity that I experienced. The yoga gave me a calm, relaxed feeling both mentally and physically. These feelings were totally foreign to me, and very much needed.

I discovered the work of another author too whose words went right through my defences and became part of me, like rain entering soil. I began to practise meditation as instructed. It is as though I am taking baby steps but they add up quickly and the effects manifest as small miracles in my life now. I have learnt to become more aware of how anger and other negative emotions arise, exist and dissipate. This awareness slows the process down and I am no longer overwhelmed by anger and rage. When the process slows down, I can see anger developing, which allows me to have choice in how I respond (or not) to these feelings. My self-control is getting stronger.

I can never bring back the life I brought to an end or take away the pain and suffering I brought to the family of the man I killed and for that I feel remorse.

What I can do is to practise and develop awareness of how my thoughts, words, and actions positively or negatively affect other people. Meditation and mindfulness has been the most effective way for me to understand myself, take control of my life, and become a more compassionate and responsible person. I look forward to the day that I can practise with the support of a meditation group. It can be tough sometimes to practise alone.



“I’m taking baby steps...”



Strong and Steady: The Warrior


 by Sam

The story behind this yoga pose, Virabhadrasana (the Warrior) is found in a popular Sanskrit epic. The hero, Shiva, hears of his wife's death. Enraged by this news, he tears his hair out and fashions from his hair the fiercest of warriors, whom he names Virabhadra. He commands the warrior to destroy the people he blames for his wife's death, who are gathered at a feast. Virabhadra thrusts his way up through the earth into the midst of the party and points resolutely at his opponent. The pose shown here captures this powerful moment.

Like myths from other traditions, this one has meaning beyond the drama itself. It would be easy to interpret this as a story about revenge. However, it is a teaching about letting go - or "slaying" - our ego, not something outside of ourselves. So Shiva is the higher self who is slaying his own prideful ego. Here's how to do the Warrior pose:



1. Stand with your feet wide apart, and parallel.
2. Place your hands on your hips and see how your feet, hips, and shoulders all face forwards. Turn your left foot out and make sure your hips are still facing forwards.
3. Breathing out, bend your left knee as far as you can. If your knee goes beyond your heel, increase the distance between your feet, until your knee is in line with your heel. Don't let your knee collapse forwards or inwards as this puts strain on the knee. Lower your hands, and hold this position for three natural, easy breaths.

 These pictures of a prisoner at HMP Springhill were taken from our book, *Becoming Free Through Meditation and Yoga*. This illustrated guide to yoga and meditation is free to anyone in prison. If you would like a copy, please write to us.

4. Raise your arms to shoulder height, palms down. Make sure your shoulders are dropped. Extend your arms - from armpits to fingertips. Turn your head to look at your middle left fingernail. Your spine stays centred and erect. Stay and breathe, keeping a steady gaze, for at least five breaths. This cultivates a sense of quietness within the strength of the pose.

It is as though your hands can rest on cushions of air as you keep focussing on the breath. Your back leg is like a steel girder supporting the entire frame. Within, all is quiet, gently breathing.

5. On an out-breath, press down with your left heel and straighten your leg and come back to your starting position.
6. Now repeat on the other side.

Regular practice of warrior pose reduces stiffness in your neck and shoulders, makes your knees and hips more flexible, and strengthens your legs and arms. You don't need a lot of space - you can do it standing next to your bed.

This pose is especially helpful if you feel the chill in winter, as it energises and creates warmth throughout the body. Great for cold days when you're feeling sluggish. Hold it for longer to really feel how it warms the shoulders and legs!

Psychologically, the pose teaches you to stand on your own two feet. It takes a lot of courage and stamina, so you find these qualities rising to the surface too. Best of all, our view of the warrior starts to change and we can see that when we are tranquil and steady, we are at our strongest and most invincible.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SPIRIT

'Spotlight on the spirit' provides prisoners, staff, and ex-prisoners a chance to share their spirituality, especially as it applies to current issues.



Building Good Relations

Imam Jahangir Miah is part of the Chaplaincy at HMPYOI Swinfen Hall. Here he describes his journey in helping people to examine how they can break down barriers and find ease with each other.

I am a Muslim Chaplain working in a prison for a number of years now. I started the service as a volunteer not knowing what to expect. It was a difficult time as it was just after the terrorist attack in the USA, testing times not only in prison but for society in general, especially if you were a Muslim. Also as I had not visited a prison before I only knew about prisons and prisoners from what I had read in the papers and the news.

When I first started walking on the landings, prisoners and some staff would look and stare at me, as one expects from someone new I guess. I used to think: is it because of the way I dress in Islamic clothing and prayer cap? Some would ask me why I dress the way I do. Sometimes I would hear someone shouting out of the window to intimidate me and even call me names. This didn't affect me as I was aware that this wasn't directed at me; rather it was due to ignorance and people not being aware and having a stereotypical view. But on the flip side there were prisoners who had so much respect and I could see the potential in the prisoners to change their lives around. This respect factor was one of the main reasons which encouraged me to engage more.



It's natural to be interested in each other

• He who dishonours the religion of another dishonours his own •

- Emperor Asoka
(269-232 BC)

There is a famous quote from almost all religious texts. "Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself". I think respecting people and not judging them, no matter what they have done goes a long way. I like to think I am fair to all prisoners and staff whether they belong to my faith or not. If I didn't respect people then why would I expect them to respect

have a better place to live in, where people support and respect each other.

The Inter-Faith workshops we run are very popular. Prisoners get an insight into other faiths. Some of the feedback following the workshops is excellent. Some say they'd never even thought about some of the things they learned. The aim of the workshop is not about trying to convert people to any particular faith but about promoting respect for other people and helping participants to understand why religion is important to people.

A few years back I visited a cathedral where I had a dialogue with the Bishop. The dialogue was between Muslim and Christian and about 1000 people were there. I think I broke a few barriers on that day because I was the first Muslim to speak at that particular cathedral. People asked me how I felt walking

into a cathedral? My answer: comfortable and welcomed!

The most important work of all is the day to day interaction. Trying to be helpful, respectful, honest and fair builds up a form of friendship and friendship is so powerful that it breaks all sorts of barriers and people don't feel threatened by each other because there is trust.

It's all about making a positive difference - and everyone in the prison community plays an essential part, in that, not just me.

me? It's a two-way traffic.

I have always had a passion and am a great believer that building good relations between different people is key to solving problems - common sense, some would say. Some of the work I do is trying to build bridges between different faith groups by holding Inter-Faith workshops, attending and contributing towards the Race Relations Meeting, taking part in activities in local communities, places of worship and schools. When people do their bit in their communities then we

Crossword solutions:
ACROSS 1 Mince, 7 Bauble, 8 Shepherds, 10 Crown, 11 Carol, 14 Santa, 15 Men, 17 Gold, 22 Gitter, 26 Tinsel, 28 Cracker, 30 Robin, 31 Reindeer, 2 Nine, 3 Pear, 4 Pudding, 5 Claus, 6 Three, 7 Bells, 8 Stocking, 9 Sprouts, 12 Card, 13 Yoga, 15 Mistletoe, 16 Merry, 18 Log, 19 Date, 21 Wise, 23 Ivy, 24 Manger, 25 Myrrh, 27 Tree, 29 Pie

Clearing the passages

 By Kate

This is the season of coughs and colds—and blocked noses! But our nose is a brilliant piece of kit: it filters and moistens the air, warms it up, and helps the circulation, so that by the time the air reaches our lungs, it is clean and in the best condition for our body. Often overlooked, the nose is a truly miraculous machine which helps us stay healthy. What to do if your nose is stuffed up? Here is an exercise that will help you breathe again, through both nostrils. It will also give you a sense of tranquillity, balance and clarity.

If you think you can't breathe through your nose, especially if you've broken it, take heart. Some of us at the PPT have had our noses broken but we've learnt it's still possible to breathe through the nose. Although it feels blocked at first, the nose can adjust if we – very gently - practise using it!

1. Sit comfortably, with a straight back. Tune into the sensations of the breath in the nostrils. If it's hard to breathe through the nose, then just notice this.
2. Now bring the right hand up so that you can put your thumb on the on the right side of the nose. Press gently with the thumb, so that you close the right nostril and just breathe through the left as best you can. Take five slow, even breaths like this, just breathing in and out on the left side. Tip: if the left nostril is completely blocked, leave the right nostril slightly open.
3. Now release the thumb from the right nostril, and close the left nostril with the forefinger. Take five slow, even breaths, just using the right side.
4. Now take five slow, even breaths through both nostrils.
5. And now, repeat; closing first the right nostril and taking five steady breaths; then closing the left nostril and taking five steady breaths; and then taking five breaths with both nostrils open. If you're feeling comfortable, carry on for five rounds...

And now just letting go of any control of the breath, still sitting, notice the inner stillness...and how much clearer your nose feels!



‘ I prefer winter. Something waits beneath it. ’

Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009), artist

London Marathon Runner 2010

It was a thrill to win a place in the 2010 London Marathon on 25th April. Our runner will be James, who first got in touch with The Prison Phoenix Trust when he spent 15 months in prison 12 years ago. Since release, he and his partner have had two sons and now they are expecting a third child. James is full-time carer to the boys. He still goes to NA, uses the 12 steps to stay clean of drugs (and says he sees running as part of his addiction now!)

James is aiming to raise at least £2000 for The Prison Phoenix Trust through his sponsored marathon run.

If you can support James with even a very small sum you can donate through his page on www.justgiving.com. It means a lot if runners have supporters along on the day too. If you and a friend want to join our PPT supporters' group in London, keep 25th April free in your 2010 diary. It will be great to see you there!

This newsletter goes to members of the prison community and to our many friends on the outside who continue to offer us their encouragement. The Prison Phoenix Trust is a small charity depending totally on supporters' kindness and financial generosity to continue in our work to help our friends inside. One way you can help is to consider remembering us in your will. Any sum, however small, is much appreciated.

Prison Phoenix Trust Newsletter
PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF
registered charity no. 327907

