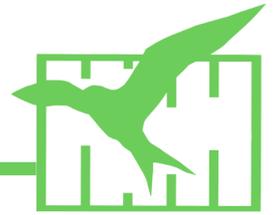
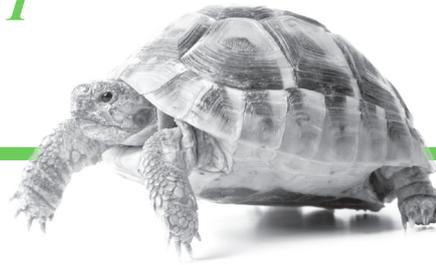


# PRISON PHOENIX TRUST

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

www.theppt.org.uk



Newsletter, Spring 2017



## SLOW MOTION

**W**hether your day is non-stop activity or you spend a lot of time behind the door, your head may sometimes seem to be going a million miles an hour. Despite this busyness in your mind, you may - strangely enough - experience a dullness to life, no zip, no interest, a feeling of being worn down and powerless. What's going on here? Is it possible to slow your thinking down, and for life to take on meaning again?

Most definitely. When you read our friend from HMP Lindholme's letter on page two, you'll see how this happened to him, quite by surprise. Simply paying attention to his breath one night, he gradually started to experience his mind and body as if for the first time. The next day this feeling of everything being brand new continued, and also everything being in slow motion. "It was very strange, in the nicest way," he says.

Sports people who train their minds and bodies to a professional level, including racing car drivers, sometimes say they can experience things as if in slow motion, giving them more reaction time, and allowing them to see and experience everything with great clarity, even when negotiating a track packed with other cars at 165 miles per hour.

### Feeling more alive

Like our friend, you may have experienced this slowing down, this sense of everything seeming more alive, more real, more connected to you. Sometimes it happens when you don't think you can take any more and things have become desperate.

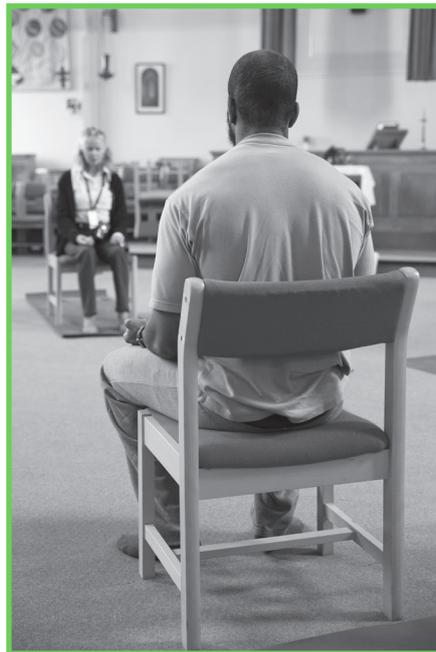
(Sometimes it happens when you're extremely relaxed.)

The thing that he and many others like him in prison realise is that when you focus on your breathing with absolutely no agenda, with no intention of anything changing, no idea about what meditation is, or what it's meant to do, that's when this other way of experiencing life appears.

When you're not trying to do anything, but being simply a human being (the clue is in the name), and give up on the doing, completely investing or spending your whole self in this breath (this one!) from the top of your head right through to your toes, that's when you're in touch with a being or a way of being (your self) that knows what is what, and that feels more alive to life again. Meditation and yoga aren't magic in that they make problems disappear. Our friend, for example, says certain memories still haunt him. But he also says he feels like he's woken up.

Whether you have been meditating a long time, or whether it's something you've only ever heard about, the next time you sit down in a relatively quiet place by yourself, see what it's like to tune into your

breath, allow the in-breath to come in - it happens very naturally and is easy to focus on. And when it comes time to breathe out, allow yourself to do nothing but be fully present all the way to the end of that natural out breath. If there is a pause before you breathe in again, experience that pause, and the stillness and quiet that always abides there. And then let yourself be breathed again. Give over with each out breath, and see how things can slow down, and come alive.



Feeling connected at HMP Winchester



Love Sam - and Lucy, Sally, Jason, Clive, David, Kaye, Victoria & Brent



**"I don't want to be the one who says life is beautiful. I want to be the one who feels it."**

~ Marty Rubin, author and activist, 1930 - 1994

### 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 and meditation sensitively tailored to students' needs. This safe practice offers students ultimate peace of mind. The PPT encourages prisoners and prison staff through correspondence, books, CDs, newsletters, free taster workshops and weekly classes.*



Check out the yoga and meditation column each month in Inside Time and tune into our radio programme 3 times a week on National Prison Radio.



From  
HMP Lindholme

**A few weeks ago I wrote to you asking for some kind of help.** I wasn't getting the right amount of sleep or rest that my body, mind and soul desperately needed and was having all kinds of problems. On Christmas Eve I got your snowman Christmas card, newsletter, yoga CD and book and a very nice letter from you.

Now, I'm not sure if this is meant to happen but I was laid in bed listening to the CD and following instructions on breathing and I felt like I was a stranger inside my own mind and body and was seeing myself and experiencing myself for the very first time. When I woke on Christmas Day I 100% felt like I'd had the best sleep ever. If I didn't know better I'd swear that my body and mind had been taken over and every touch, smell, every movement was as if I was finding it all for the very first time in slow motion. It was very strange in the nicest way.

I went to phone my daughters (I have five) and wife (I have one, haha) and I don't know how but I was okay. I'm missing them so much and they miss me. I was taken by armed police on Christmas Day last year and the memories still haunt my girls, so talking to them at Christmas was something I was worrying about in case I wasn't the strong Daddy they know.

But I feel as if I've woken up. I have a lot more drive, you know, va va voom. I'm not sure how to deal with this but one thing I'm positive of is that it's thanks to you replying to my letter and having all that came to me on Christmas Eve.

From  
HMP Long Lartin



**I have been following the yoga and meditation on the radio, and I feel it's doing me really good.** In 2007 I had throat cancer. I had a laryngectomy which left me with a hole in my throat. My breathing became very shallow as this hole (stoma) is now my air way. I have been following the deep breathing and I feel this has really helped me with better breathing.

One sunny afternoon I had done a bit of yoga and settled down to do a

little meditation. A strange thing happened when I came to the end of my meditation – I began to smile. I looked in the mirror and I had a big grin on my face. Why, I don't recall but I just felt good...

I was wondering if, as I don't have nose and mouth breathing anymore, when I do my yoga and breathing, will I get the full benefit breathing through my stoma?

Thank you for bringing some peace into an otherwise manic situation.

*What you're doing with the stoma breathing is exactly right! We all have things our bodies don't do exactly like other people's. As long as you're paying attention to your breathing and letting go into the breath, you can't go wrong. Ed.*

From  
HMP Usk

**Thanks for the items and advice in helping get our meditation group off the ground.** We've

been going since November and it's been a great success. We use the multi-faith room at lunchtime, Monday to Friday. A few posters were put up to help advertise. Some days we've had a full house of a dozen. Other days it's been just me and someone else, averaging about five, which is great. New people roll in and roll out and some keep coming back.

We did have an issue with one of the faith groups wanting to pray at the same time, so we got the chaplaincy to resolve the scheduling conflict. We now refer to the meditation as an interfaith activity, which enables us to keep using the multi-faith room, and everyone seems to be happy with that. Of course, during the session, we don't talk about faith, we just keep it focussed on the breath and the benefits.

Each session is only 15 minutes. This makes it accessible and not onerous to the curious, but of value for the regulars. At first, I would just play the meditation track from the Prison Phoenix Trust CD, but now I read a script which I have adapted from the suggestions you sent. It helps people find a comfortable but attentive body position and describes the process of counting the breath and returning to counting when the mind wanders. I keep time and say 'Ding!' at the end. (We're trying to order a singing bowl through the chaplaincy.) Afterwards, we talk, and I try to offer any guidance, referring to the PPT books and CDs.

The funny part is that this group is completely prisoner driven. I came up



# Prisoners'

with the idea and thought it through with some of the other guys, worked with an orderly to develop a sound proposal and then presented it to chaplaincy staff. Their only involvement was approving it!

I am amazed at how easy and successful this group has been. I'm also blown away by all the positive comments from attendees about how it's helped them with the many different issues we all face. Such a diverse bunch have attended. I look forward to every session.

From  
HMP Leeds



**Having never done yoga before, I admit I was a little sceptical to start with.**

However my suppleness has improved greatly and mentally I feel "cleansed" after each session – almost like doing a hard-drive tune up on a PC.

From  
HMP Bronzefield

**I received your package today and it was excellent.**

The book is simple and easy to follow, and I will be sending the CD to my sister on the outside who is dealing with anxiety issues since I've been in prison. I hope yoga and meditation helps her as it is helping me.

I am in a shared cell so finding some alone time to practice yoga and meditation will be challenging but as I already felt the benefits of both yoga and meditation I'm sure I will work something out with my cellmate.



From  
HMP Littlehey

**I get out this August, which is quite a big thing, scary but exciting.**

I'm hoping to join a Buddhist centre when I'm out which would be good. Meditation and my Buddhist practice is helping me stay mostly positive about it all but I guess I'm looking for reassurance it will be OK, which is unfair as there's nothing you can do really.

It seems like it might be quite hard to follow the path and live in the "real" world with all my past behind me. I know I should deal only in the present, but my future is more uncertain than most.

My meditation is going quite well

# Letters



although for the past two months I've been sitting cross-legged on the floor and after 20 minutes my feet are quite numb which is putting a cap on how long I can meditate for. Does this pass? Bending my left leg to the required positions hurts the left knee joint. Perhaps it's just not possible for me to sit comfortably in these positions?

*You shouldn't continue sitting in a position which hurts your knee. Choose a different position (such as sitting on a chair). Do you only notice the numbness once you get up from sitting? That is often the case, and isn't dangerous. So if you can find a sitting position that doesn't hurt your knee, you can try sitting for a little bit longer (25 or 30 minutes). The numbness may decrease over the weeks, as your body gets used to the position. The postures and movements of yoga are a great help with this too! Ed.*

**From  
HMP Full Sutton**



**D**o you have any advice on pain and how to cope with it? I suffer from severe arthritis in my wrist from a

motorbike accident and surgeries. I take codeine-based pain relief to be able to cope and to engage in activities like writing or the gym. I dislike this as my body is pure, apart from this. I eat healthy, exercise every day, don't smoke, don't drink any caffeine apart from a cup of green tea a day. I don't take illicit drugs either, but then I have to take this pharmaceutical heroin derivative. If I don't I am in terrible pain and can't do a lot of things.

I feel complete as a human even in these circumstances, being six years over tariff on a two year IPP, BUT – and a big but – I can't cope without pain relief. I dislike that I am reliant on it to function.

I've tried to be stoical, I've tried mindfulness and nothing can overpower the power of the pain. It throbs incessantly the minute the pain relief wears off. I have tried all physical and medical options to eradicate the pain but it's not worked.

Even during yoga it's excruciating pain but I just go with it. It's okay doing yoga and meditation as I accept it, but I can't do yoga and meditate 24/7.

*Many people write to us with this challenge of chronic pain. You said that it's okay doing yoga and meditation as you accept it. Here you've hit the nail on the head: acceptance. Maybe you accept it during meditation and yoga because at those times you are consciously trying to*

*embody principles like acceptance.*

*At those times, you aren't able to take the pain away, but you can change your relationship to it, how you respond to it.*

*Another thing that can make a difference is not to resist the pain. This is similar to accepting it, but it's actively being with it. Keep your attention grounded in the breath as you've learned to do in meditation, look at the pain, for a short amount of time: Where exactly is it located? How intense is it? How is it changing even in this moment? And how is your resistance to it changing? Stay curious about it. (This might sound like a strange word, but it does take real curiosity.) Stay connected to your breathing as you put yourself completely in the pain. Over time, your relationship to it may change. The pain may not get less intense straight away, but there might be less suffering. There is some evidence to suggest that spending time with pain in this way changes neural pathways which transmit signals to the brain, decreasing the discomfort.*

*I also hear you saying you don't like to be dependent on the drugs. But maybe it's okay to let modern medicine help you, alongside other methods you are trying out? You are not a failure because you make a considered decision to use medication as needed to make life bearable. Ed.*

## Meditation Corner

# Chock-a-Block

**R**ight now, this very moment, what is on your mind? There will almost certainly be thoughts about this newsletter, article, words, meanings... but perhaps there are also underlying feelings that are harder to pin down: the lack of space and freedom, difficulties with people, food, noise, being away from those you care about. We are not always vividly aware of these feelings, but they still influence the outlook we have each day, and will definitely make you feel more like a prisoner rather than a human being. When your mind is chock-a-block with unconscious thoughts how are you ever to find peace?

The good news is that breath-based meditation is the perfect practice for uncovering such feelings, and even just a few minutes can enable you to unobtrusively find a little peace. If you are sitting down with this newsletter then you can try this right now, even if there is noise and bustle around you. Sitting



**By Jason**

upright, imagine your head is being pulled ever so gently upwards, and then just relax that feeling and be still.

As you read this, draw your attention to your breathing, and notice the inhalations and exhalations. Just breathe normally through the nose and continue to focus on the movement of breath in your nostrils. You may find it helpful to silently count the out-breaths from 1 to 10 and then begin again. Keep this going for a few minutes. If you notice your attention being drawn to something else, return to the breath counting and let go of that disturbance. At first this can seem annoying, but try to see that every time a thought appears there is the opportunity to let it go. You are now able to let go of anxieties that were unconscious, each time they bubble to the surface and become visible.

It is not often our thoughts and worries are to be welcomed, but in this practice we should – it shows they are actually on the verge of being released. All you need do is focus upon the breath, and notice thoughts bubble to the surface. Be patient – and keep returning to the breath. That chock-a-block feeling will gradually start to clear. When that happens you may start to appreciate the space between thoughts. Just rest in that feeling of openness, but don't worry if thoughts come back. It's just another chance to let them go!



**'Rush Hour'  
from HMP Wakefield**



# Yoga and Health

 By Sam



**Y**oga and meditation have been practised for thousands of years, though not necessarily in the ways you commonly see today. They were originally tools for spiritual growth and that's why we recommend them. But they also have tremendous physical benefits, which are becoming more and more widely accepted.

You may be drawn to yoga and meditation for the physical resilience they can give; perhaps they're an important part of your spiritual path; or maybe your motivation for practising these ancient disciplines lie somewhere in between. Whatever your reasons, we thought you'd be interested in knowing a little bit more about how yoga and meditation is being accepted by health professionals, including the NHS.

## What's happening in my body?

**T**here are things in the body that can be measured, which indicate how healthy you are in certain areas, things like stress hormones, and something called GABA\*. Scientists have measured these things and compared people who do yoga with those who don't. There are many positive findings for yoga and meditation. For example, they found that cortisol (a major stress hormone), can go down after just one yoga session. With a bit of fancy equipment, you can also measure something called heart-rate variability (HRV). This reflects the ability of our

physical and emotional selves to go from active to relaxed easily. There's evidence that shows HRV goes up significantly after just eight weeks of yoga. (That's a good thing, because having a low HRV is linked to being prone to a wide range of illnesses.)<sup>1</sup>

*\*gamma-aminobutyric acid – the more of this you have in your system, the more resilient you tend to be at handling difficult situations.*

<sup>1</sup> The Principles and Practice of Yoga in Health Care, Khalsa et al

**Y**ou may be lucky to go to one of the 140 weekly yoga and meditation classes that happen each week in 75 UK and Irish prisons, secure hospitals, bail hostels and immigration removal centres. Did you know the NHS funds some of these classes, including those at Pentonville, Dartmoor and Hydebank Wood?

One of the NHS' values is "to improve the health and wellbeing of patients, communities and its staff... This value also recognises that to really improve lives, the NHS needs to be helping people and their communities take responsibility for living healthier lives." It's third principle says, "The NHS aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism... in the provision of high-quality care that is safe [and] effective."

The NHS staff in various prisons have weighed up the evidence and seen that yoga sessions can truly help them meet their aims. So, rest assured that yoga is a tried and tested approach!

## Make it Last!

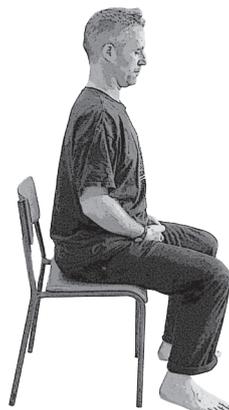
**I**f you feel like you're on a hamster wheel in your own mind, or even just a little out of sorts, try this exercise, making your out-breath longer than your in-breath. It can really help to increase your HRV (see above). Don't try too hard. Just enjoy the relief of slowing down and being truly present.

slowly as you count to 10. You will have to use some control to make the out-breath twice as long, but you can do it.

5. Keep going like this for 10 rounds or even up to 30 minutes if you wish: breathing in for 5, breathing out for 10.

1. Sit on the edge of a chair or your bed, feet flat on the floor, spine upright, hands in your lap, eyes closed. When you breathe in next, let it come in slowly as you count to 5 (about 5 seconds). Now breathe out slowly, again counting to 5.
2. At the end of every out-breath, wait. Because we breathe in automatically, we never need to worry about the in-breath. It will arrive on its own. This wait, this pause before the next in-breath, is like the still centre of a turning wheel. It is precious. Enjoy it. It may last anything from a second to 5 seconds. Let it occur naturally.
3. And now repeat, breathing in as you count to 5, and breathing out as you count to 5. Do this for 5 rounds.
4. On the 6th round, breathe in as you count to 5, but now breathe out more

Afterwards, let go of counting and controlling the breath, and just appreciate simple, natural breathing. It's great to carry on after this, moving seamlessly into silent meditation, staying with each in-breath, each out-breath. Even though life around you may be full of noise, you'll find stillness and peace.



**W**hen scientific evidence begins to emerge that something is good for you, it's easy to think that it will cure all your ills. (Eat nothing but broccoli and you'll never get sick!) But what people in prison practising yoga and meditation have told us for the last three decades is that they start to feel healthy and well in themselves when they do additional things they enjoy or which they know help them, like attending a 12-step group, doing art, joining a choir, or becoming part of your faith community. And what many people say makes a big difference is doing something to help other people.

# Prayer Changes You

by Rabbi Lionel Blue

*Rabbi Lionel Blue was a Rabbi and broadcaster who often spoke on Radio 4's Thought For The Day. He served as a Patron of the Prison Phoenix Trust from its earliest days until his death in December last year. We will miss him dearly. This article was first published in the PPT newsletter in Spring 2008.*

**P**rayers changes you. Makes you more honest about yourself which is a most important thing or you project your own shortcomings onto the cosmos. It's good to keep going to empty places of worship and just sit and trust and give it time. Is the silence empty or is there something in it?

To be with silence, you have to let go of a lot of layers. Sometimes you meet yourself saying, "I'm a fool doing this" at the first layer. The second layer is discomfort and worry – "Have I left the gas on?" The third is often the welling up of anger, hatred, or self pity. You have to allow it all to come to the surface so that it doesn't fester inside.

If you can just let yourself happen, then you can sit back and eventually become aware of a kind of peace coming to you. You feel how nice it is. You start to see that to love your neighbour as yourself, you must start by loving yourself first.

Think of the people you respect and ask them to come and live in you for a while. Think of people you've loved who are no more and make room for them too.

I like Marcus Aurelius who said that if there is a God, he will follow him and if there isn't, be Godlike. Anything that makes you kinder, more generous and more honest about yourself, you're going the right way. Each of us has a piece of the jigsaw and when we are put



together we discover the whole. After all, what is religion? Not doing to your neighbour what you don't want to be done to you. Your success makes you clever but only your problems make you wise – they come from God and are of value. Our problems and failures are only problems in a success-oriented culture. They are your spiritual pluses which teach you mercy and compassion. Sometimes people think they're no good. What makes me think I'm all right inside whenever people don't accept me, is that God is always here. If I ask him what is my next step, he always responds and shows me what it is. No one can solve their own problems because we are not objective enough. So give your problems

to God and he will respond. God makes his living by forgiving sins and he prefers big ones to others.

If you look around there is always someone worse off than you and if you do something for that person, you feel the electric current running through you. You can always change things quietly. You can offer someone a cup of tea, offer to do a cleaning job for them or just offer them your listening ears, your time for an hour.

What is joy? Giving someone a present! Whether it is your time, your friendliness or kindness. You are never stopped from doing that in prison. I come down the stairs every morning, open the curtains, see dawn coming up, see life starting. You are part of it. I am part of it.



## Tigger Ramsay-Brown

**W**e were saddened last year by the death of one of our trustees, **Tigger Ramsay-Brown, aged 94.** Tigger was the sister of the Prison Phoenix Trust's founder, Ann Wetherall, and served as trustee from early in the charity's life until her death.

Tigger lived a rich and exciting life, mainly in India and the UK. As a child, her first ever memory was being carried up the Himalayas in a basket strapped to a pony. She was sent to England to school, but was always up to mischief, eventually getting expelled.

For many years she worked for Oxfam, where her passion and energy enabled

so many people to be helped. We will remember Tigger as a forthright, fun and deeply compassionate woman, and a beloved friend to the Trust.



**Tigger, age 91, on the back of a Harley**





# Getting the Splinter Out

by Caroline and "George"

**T**his April, we're releasing a new book, *Peace Inside: a prisoner's guide to meditation*. Half the book explains how to practice silent breath-based meditation. The other half is letters from prisoners to the Trust over the years, about how meditation is helping them overcome difficulties, and replies from our staff and volunteers. Like our other books and CDs, *Peace Inside* will be free to prisoners, officers and other prison staff. Just write to us after 21<sup>st</sup> April and we'll send you a copy. (The book will be for sale to the general public from that date, with all royalties going to the Trust's work in prisons.) To whet your appetite we've included part of one exchange between 'George' (we've changed his name) and Caroline, from the new book.

Dear Caroline,

Thank you so much for your reply. When I started reading it, little tears flowed freely down my face. To say I wrote a moving and sensitive letter. For someone who does not know me to see that in me moved me very deeply. When these tears flow, I can't quite understand it. I think I am too old, I shouldn't be crying.

You see, mostly I was brought up, if you can call it that, in homes and care. But I have tried to make good. When I was at home I cried so much from the beatings and no love that I just gave up crying. I had no more tears left and now it's like, no George, keep it down, keep it down, must not be weak. To say I had a hard childhood is an understatement. I did not have one at all.

I have two beautiful boys I love very deeply and who have been brought up with so much love and safety. I feel ashamed of myself that I cannot be there for them. That is hurting me very much and them too, no doubt. Being locked up I can kind of handle. It's all that goes with it that's hard, if you know what I mean. I do not have self pity.

The yoga we get on Monday and Thursday afternoons can be very hit and miss as to whether the prison has enough staff on to let it happen. So it is up to me in my cell. When I first went to yoga class I thought yes, just stretching and help keep fit. But now I read the Bible every day and try to meditate which is the place that I really want to go but even understanding meditation is so very hard: Where is it going? What does it do? Will all the pain be worth it?

Is it about trying to keep your mind blank so that you can get the splinter out? Is it important to do the yoga first or can you just meditate?

I am very insecure. I know my girlfriend has been lying to me on the phone. I have only seen my boys twice in a whole year. I wrote this letter as well to try to lift my stress and it has worked a bit, so thank you. I shall now try to mediate and pray



Peace inside at HMP Winchester

for peace inside and see how we go.

Peace and love,  
George

Dear George,

What a wonderful letter. Although you say you are insecure, it takes a great deal of courage to write such a letter. You say you can't understand the tears, but hearing about your childhood, and the sadness of not seeing your two boys brought tears to my eyes, and I am older than you! It is not unusual for this to happen when you are inside, being on your own (so to speak) and having the time to think about things. Do you think your tears are part of the letting-go process of past and present hurts? A sort of washing through? Tears can also be a sheer longing for love. Does it seem like that for you? If you see tears as a purification, that will transcend pity.

I can so appreciate that you find yoga and meditation difficult, but please take heart and keep going. You wonder about the value of doing yoga, and I would say the value of yoga is that the exercises bring well-being and harmony to the body, which in turn brings balance and harmony to the mind. To illustrate this,

if you are not at peace in the mind, then you wobble when trying to balance on one leg! – so harmony in mind, harmony in body.

And you ask about meditation. The more you practise, the more the pain and tears will recede. It can be a long slow process, but gradually, gradually you will come to discover the benefits. It is best to practise meditation daily, focussing on the breath, and to practise yoga when you can. Do you focus on the breath at other times when you are not meditating? For instance, when you feel emotional or stressed? Are you noticing your breath as you read this?

You mention you have started reading the Bible and praying, and that also shows how much you are doing to turn your life around. Have you thought of talking to a chaplain? They are very experienced in listening to people and it may be something you would consider doing. It might be a great help to you to talk face to face with someone, in addition to writing letters.

Looking forward to hearing from you.  
Go well,  
Caroline



# Becoming Free... Again!



**B**ecoming Free Through Yoga and Meditation was the first book the PPT published, back in 1995. For the last 22 years, we have sent thousands of copies to prisoners, and heard back about how helpful it is. *Becoming Free* offers all the help you need to set up a daily yoga and meditation practice - a yoga routine that can be done in a small space, and detailed instructions on starting meditation and dealing with issues you may face.

Now, we have published a new edition. It features all the same advice, but we have refreshed the pictures and brought it up to date. Here's an extract from the book - one page from each of the authors, Sandy Chubb and Sister Elaine MacInnes. If you'd like a copy, please write to us at the usual address and we'll send you one for free if you're in prison.

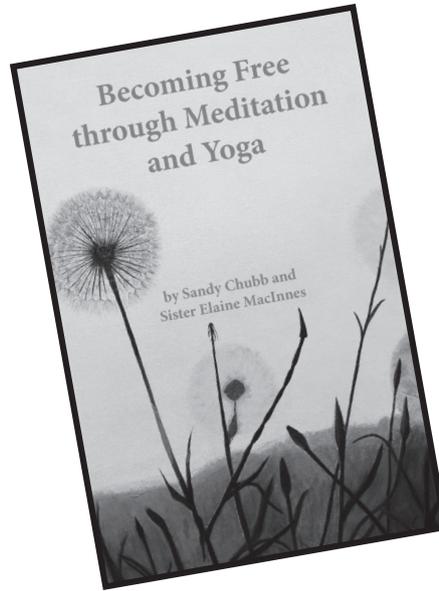
**I** never feel we at the Prison Phoenix have to sell meditation. Today there just seems to be an invisible magnet reaching all over the world, attracting certain people, who for some reason or other, are aware of what can be experienced in meditation and want to try it. I know that not all of us who live at the same time experience the same things, so there will be many who do not feel this way. We respect them, whilst still addressing the growing number who seek to ease the pain and darkness of our lonely era, by means of meditation. I find it not at all surprising that many such people are in our prison population.

When scientists designate our time as the age of 'chaos', it is to be expected that some of us experience its uncertainty and fragility. Many of the old props and sureties have disappeared! And in a religious sense, what has been taken away is encountered in the ache of its loss.

I am always struck by the fact that the home of a prisoner and a monk are indicated by the same word 'cell'. We at the Trust often say in our writings that a prisoner's cell is not unlike the retreat rooms we go to every once in a while for silence and reflection. They are inclined to be small, with only a bed, table and chair. And we go to the cell to deal with pain and darkness, for the human spirit is always trying to transcend itself, spontaneously searching for life and light.

A recent letter from a prisoner brought all this in focus: *"As long as I can remember, I have had this hurt inside. I can't get away from it, and sometimes I cut or burn myself so that the pain will be in a different place and on the outside. Then I saw your newsletter last month, and something spoke to me about meditation and although I didn't really know what it is, I wrote for your book. I just want you to know that after only four weeks of meditating, a half hour in the morning and at night, for the first time in my life, I see a tiny spark of something within myself that I can like."*

Sister Elaine



**B**y exercising slowly, learning to consciously relax in each posture, and concentrating on the breath, both the external and internal systems are influenced. When you tune into the breath in this focussed way, for periods of stillness, the practice of yoga begins. Everything starts to work properly from the glands to the nervous system ... to yourself.

So asanas don't just work on the body. When the mind is concentrated, power is released to work on infirmities because our bodies influence our minds. Something much deeper starts to happen too when your being dissolves into a harmony of breath, mind, body and spirit. You realise your Oneness. And without having to do a thing, without having to imagine anything or visualise anything, you experience the inner force - the Sacred - which is greater than your everyday self.

## Tuning out ... and tuning in

Funnily enough, it is this tuning out of the racket of your everyday lives and tuning in, with full concentration, into your inner being which many of you say you find so scary.

Ask you to fight an enemy, rescue a child from a burning house or climb a

mountain and there's no problem. Ask instead that you release all your daily problems and clutter — even for as short a time as half an hour — and some of you say you feel unsafe. This kind of unknown can be a real challenge, maybe because you are connecting yourself with your mind which often causes unhappiness.

Nevertheless, yoga is the experience of unity with the body, mind and spirit. When you experience that union and, in turn realise that you are one with the rest of Creation, you can see that there is no need to be afraid. Because the mind, in this context, is just a tiny speck in a much greater whole. And how refreshed we feel after half an hour's practice like this.

Yoga can be practised by both healthy and unhealthy people, stiff and supple, young and old. It is a huge help for concentration and meditation.

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Indian prisoner and yoga teacher Sri Aurobindo was wrongly arrested for terrorism and, in Alipore Jail, South of Calcutta, he was put in a stone cell, five feet long by five feet wide — a cave fronted by bars.

*"At Alipore, I could feel how deep can be the love of man for all created things, how thrilled a man can be on seeing a bird. I looked instead towards a blank wall. Day after day, the mind rebelled and felt increasingly desolated, time itself an unbearable torture."*

Then during his meditation practice, he discovered that yoga is not the product of personal effort. Acknowledging the existence of an inner force, he came to see a spirit of faith or reverence, and complete self-surrender, as the only route to wisdom and faith.

*"Finally, there spread over my being, such a gentle and cooling breeze, the heated brain became relaxed, easy and supremely blissful, such as in all my life I had never known before. From that day, all my troubles of prison life were over."*

Sandy



# Yoga for Bad Backs

 By Lucy

**A**lmost everyone gets back pain at some point in their life. While it can be a horrible experience, a sore back is rarely serious, and there are lots of things that might help. The NHS recommends yoga, and other gentle exercise, as a treatment for back pain. You can do this routine when your back already hurts - go carefully and pay attention to your body, avoiding anything that feels wrong. You can also practise these movements frequently when you are well, to strengthen the back and prevent any future problems.



**Seated Cow**

*breathe out*



**Seated Cat**

*breathe in*

  
*move back and forth slowly  
between these, with the breath,  
10 times*



**Child**

*10 breaths*



**Sphinx**

*5 breaths*



**Knees to Chest**

*If it feels comfortable, rock gently from  
side to side and back and forth. 10 breaths.*



**Wind Releasing**

*5 breaths each side*



**Bridge**

*3 breaths, then carefully  
lower yourself down.  
Repeat.*



**Lying Twists**

*5 breaths each side*



**Rest**

*Lie like this and focus on the  
feeling of your breath flowing  
in and out for 5 minutes.*

**“You were born a child of light’s wonderful secret - you return to the beauty you have always been.”**

*~ Aberjhani, poet and author, b.1957*

*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**  
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