

PRISON PHOENIX TRUST

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Newsletter, Summer 2019

BACK TO REALITY

Someone looking in from the outside would have seen a circle of 15 of us in the sports hall, doing things of questionable value with our bodies: feet spread, holding our arms in the air for 30 seconds. Bending forward towards our toes. Swivelling our hips around. Standing on one leg. Later, on two long benches facing each other, we sat completely still and silent, eyes looking down, for longer than your average advert break on the telly. Nothing revolutionary going on there. In fact, we weren't doing anything at all, so it would seem!

So why did one of the 15 say to the group afterwards, "I feel like I've just helped myself return to reality! Is this class going to happen every Friday?" This was in Drake Hall prison, where we were running taster workshops to see if the prison would like to have yoga and meditation sessions each week. And we hear the same from men's jails too. As people voice these thoughts afterwards, others inevitably nod in agreement.

It was powerful to hear her say she'd returned to reality: as she spoke, she was clearly in touch with something true and meaningful, something which restored her to a place she wanted to be.

Smaller conversations about yoga and meditation broke out among the women, some who'd done yoga before, some who hadn't. One that I was part of discussed how this feeling of "reality" is different from how it feels a lot of the time in prison, with its endless frustrations and challenges. One person said that it's easy to feel normal life is a different world, not really real. She spoke for many when she said that despite practising yoga and meditation, it's hard to find any sense of harmony out there, mostly because of "the way other people are." But we all agreed that for yoga and meditation to have any real value, they must

affect how we are with other people in our ordinary lives. It's not just about making interesting shapes with our bodies and following our breath in meditation for a certain amount of time each day, feeling a little better, nice as that is.

A few weeks earlier, I'd met a woman in Eastwood Park Prison (see p.6). She said she'd noticed how as a result of her yoga practice, she'd started walking away from situations which used to suck her in to trouble: petty jibes and argumentative people. By developing a habit of continually bringing herself back to being aware of her body, breath and mind, her sense of who she was had loosened – maybe she no longer felt a need

to jostle her way to the top of the heap. Something new and harmonious was emerging, which allowed her to look after not just herself, but those around her and the whole situation as well.

The Drake Hall group nodded in agreement when I mentioned this: "We do a lot of walking away in here!"

It's clear from what many of you say that the practice of yoga and meditation is about being with what is difficult and responding appropriately, which may mean walking away. But not always. As a friend says on page 2, as a result of his practice, he's able to support people around him, and staff are starting to talk with him. Opportunities are showing themselves. And he's not creating additional trouble for himself when things don't go his way.

Could it be that the challenges of everyday life are also "reality"? Maybe the clarity and calm we get from our practice will help us to look deeply into situations of conflict and to see that all people are at the deepest level the same as one another. We all struggle at times and our job is to look after each other.



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

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.



"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality."

~ Martin Luther King Jr, civil rights activist (1929 - 1968)



From HMP Brixton October

Last week I was moved to Brixton from Wandsworth. There

have been a few changes and challenges but I have been able to adapt to my new environment well.

I kept my yoga and meditation going every day with half an hour asanas and half an hour breathing in a sitting position every morning at 6:30. I really enjoy the rest of my day. I'm able to apply and concentrate at work and to help and support those around me. Staff are beginning to chat and opportunities are presenting themselves.

Every morning I do one of the asanas on the *Freedom Inside* CD. Have you got any more CDs with guided yoga asanas? I would like to learn more.

Yesterday I was given a solid mahogany stool to sit on while meditating. A lifer made it and gave it to me as a gift to aid my meditation. Thank you all for helping me start on this.

November

I have moved to the recovery wing and I'm still practising most mornings. I always meditate as there are so many things I'm noticing that have changed or improved. I got a knock back on my paper parole this week and although it was disappointing, the feeling passed very quickly. I didn't do what I usually do, which is dive in a pool of self pity and make sure everyone knows about poor me. This time I just kept moving forwards. It didn't consume me like it would have before I set out on this path of

recovery and spirituality.

Ed: We have two CDs with guided yoga asana sessions – Freedom Inside and Clearing The Head, which has a full yoga, breathing, relaxation and meditation session. All prisoners and officers can write to us and request a free copy of either of these!

From HMP Gartree

During my time on the Therapeutic Community I was looking for a way to have better awareness of my emotions and possibly find a way to become calmer.

I tried a few different methods. The one thing that worked was mindfulness and meditation, which I've been doing for five years. I practise mindfulness sessions three to four times a week, plus three yoga sessions of an hour or so. I combine this with my cardio gym sessions. Regular practice has played a huge part in my wellbeing. I'm now six stone lighter with much better mental health. Knowing how I feel and why I've got this or that issue makes life much easier.

I run a weekly yoga session on the wing that about six people attend. My favourite is a vinyasa style session where there is no break and every asana runs into the next. I spend quite a lot of time with books, magazines and DVDs finding asanas that flow nicely into each other.

I cannot imagine stopping practice now. Falling asleep includes a ten minute breathing exercise that always calms me down and sends me off to sleep.

To me, yoga and related practices are about inner peace, less anxiety and improving physical and mental wellbeing, not religion. I'm still a practising Roman Catholic.

From a former prisoner

Iam unfortunate (or stupid) enough to have spent two periods of my life imprisoned. My first sentence was in 2003. Back then I found my experience of prison life to be a mostly positive one with more than adequate provision for both Buddhism (I was a Buddhist prior to being jailed and still consider myself one) and also for yoga and meditation.

I was very self-motivated to positive change back then and with few exceptions I met many fellas to whom I could relate



Prisoners'

and be friends with. Prison was never a doddle nor a breeze but it was relatively straightforward and easily understood.

Fast forward to 2018 and my second trip to jail on a much shorter sentence. The prison environment was radically different to what I had remembered. Having many different pad mates on such a short sentence, too much bang up time, no yoga classes and only fortnightly Buddhist meetings didn't make me feel relaxed nor encouraged towards positive change.

I was released on licence at the end of September 2018 and am only now beginning to feel any sense of normality or hope. I struggle with mental health issues daily but am gratefully no longer dependent on drugs or alcohol.

I love the peace of meditation and the challenges of yoga and try diligently to include them in my daily schedule. I love your newsletters dropping through my door and wish all my fellow men and women inside and out good health and strength.

From HMP Littlehey

Pace Inside, the meditation book you kindly sent me, has been very helpful.



Before I started using meditation I was in a bad, dark place. I was self-harming and on two occasions I tried to end my life. But with the help of meditation I feel at peace with my inner self. Coming into prison was a scary time for me. I had been in prison back in 1982 for only six months. In those days it was hard in prison – no TVs or electricity in cells. I wish I'd known about meditation back then.

From HMP Rye Hill
Meditation is really as simple or as hard as you make it, but the most important thing I've found is to treat meditation as your friend and not a chore.



Over the years I've tried all sorts of ways to meditate but the most effective I've found to be the simplest. I sit on the end of my bed, hands in my lap. My eyes are open, I have a straight back and I look at a spot on the back of my cell



Cuffs Off!

Living near Slough? Looking for a friendly place to practise yoga? Cuffs Off for Peace and Strength (The COPS club) offers a clean, safe space for ex-prisoners to assist in improving confidence and respect for self and others through yoga and meditation. Non-judgemental and welcoming, time here focuses on empowering people to re-join society. Those joining need to have not had an alcoholic drink or used drugs during their time in the building.

You can just turn up from 11 am – 12 noon each Thursday and stay on for a meal. The Quaker Meeting House, 74 Ragstone Rd, Slough SL1 2PX.



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Letters



door. I count my breaths in and out. In 1, out 2, in 3, out 4, up to ten then start again. I do this for 15 to 20 minutes, twice a day.

I just let the thoughts come in and fade away. I find that if you try and stop the thoughts, or fight them when they are there, it just takes you away from what you're trying to do (meditation).

I've sat for hours in the past and tried lots of things, but I've found this very basic way has been one of the most effective for me. Treat meditation as your friend and it will become your friend.

From HMP Parkhurst

I am still meditating my way through life, and am all the better for it!

I find that the practice not only affords me inner peace, but also a radiated peace around me. It is



Could You Draw or Paint Our Christmas Card?

Every year we produce a Christmas card using a picture sent to us by someone in prison. If you'd like to send us your Christmas themed pictures, we'd love to see them! The winner will get two packs of the finished cards. Please send your pictures to The Prison Phoenix Trust, PO Box 328, Oxford OX2 7HF before September 1st.



good, very good. The practice also keeps me in the present moment.

My yoga is still desperately meagre but meets my needs!

From HMP Glenochil

Still doing my weekly yoga session with my friend.

I am also using my alone time, which I rarely get, to practise as well.

As for meditation, I am practising every day now and can feel myself slowly starting to find peace. It can be very lonely in here at times and I miss friendship very much as I lost many friends when I came to prison. For now, when I feel lonely I



come to my cell, get myself comfy and meditate. Afterwards, I feel happier and less alone, but it doesn't last forever. But I know that it will help me through my time here.

I know I had to change and already I feel a much better person with a kind heart. I just wish I could get a chance to show it to others outside these walls now.

Check out the yoga and meditation column each month in Inside Time.

Meditation Corner



High Alert!



By Jason

The other morning on the way to work I had a near miss on my bicycle. A minibus driver decided not to give way on a roundabout and instead headed straight towards me. He loomed up on top of me. I pedalled madly. His wheels locked. The driver behind him blasted their horn and somehow we all missed each other by mere inches. I pedalled off as fast as possible without looking back.

Alarming moments like this inevitably happen from time to time. Afterwards I was thinking how common they are for some prisoners and how they can be woven into prison life. From your letters, it seems that much of the prison life is uneventful (a bit like my cycle commutes) but then unexpectedly something comes crashing in: a fight breaks out. Your padmate is taken to hospital after a bad time with spice. Does this mean we should always be on high-alert, wary of danger?

To investigate this, it's best that you become aware of where you are right now. If this is a busy time of day, so be

it. You will need to have a straight and relaxed back, upright with your chest lifted and your shoulders dropped. You may be sitting in a chair, or standing in a queue, perhaps for lunch or the telephone. Try to be still, keep your eyes open and just notice the breath, inhaling and exhaling gently through your nose. No one else should be able to tell you are doing anything unusual. You are simply tuned into your breath.

At first, you may feel a little odd being quiet and focussed, rather than expressive and outward, especially if you are amongst others. If someone speaks to you, or you need to acknowledge them, go ahead and do this. As soon as you can, return to your breathing. You may have thoughts trying to take your attention, but treat these in just the same way: acknowledge the thoughts, and try not to chew them over or let them run away with you. Just return to the breath and be exactly where you are right now.

Keep this practice going for as long as



Sit upright with your shoulders dropped...

you can, and notice that feelings of danger and high-alert can be acknowledged in the same way. With a calmer mind, it becomes clear whether the danger is real or a false alarm, and you can act appropriately. You may also notice that false alarms are often the result of an anxious conversation, or anxiety cultivated through dwelling on your thoughts.

After my near miss with the minibus, I was pleased I didn't get angry with the driver or feel any need for retaliation. But I now take more care on roundabouts; I'm more willing to let cars make mistakes. Perhaps you will notice more tolerance of those around you, and give people room for mistakes too. It all helps to make the world a less anxious place.



You Have What You Seek: Belly Breathing

 By Sam

There was a Japanese meditation teacher named Hakuin who lived in the 1700s. No stranger to hard times, he understood suffering, and helped a great number of people find freedom inside themselves, right in the middle of their everyday lives. He and many people before and since, from all spiritual traditions and scientists who study the human body have discovered the same thing: your own breath is a powerful ally in helping you feel better.

One of Hakuin's verses has these lines:

*How sad that people ignore the near
And search for truth afar:
Like those in the midst of water
Crying out in thirst...*

If you feel you're looking for something outside yourself to deal with your restlessness or troubles, give this breathing practice a go. Maybe what you're seeking is right here inside.

This practice uses belly breathing, and you make your in-breath the same length as your out-breath. Here's why it's useful:

- Breathing with the upper chest only and without the belly means we're using muscles in the neck and upper back, making them stiff. Sometimes people breathe so high up in their chest that their shoulders actually lift! This sends a signal to the brain that you feel threatened, and keeps you on high alert. Breathing down into the belly means you can relax the shoulders, neck and back, and this tells the brain that you are calm.
- Each time you breathe in, you are activating the part of your nervous system responsible for action. Your heart beats slightly faster, and your blood vessels constrict. There's nothing wrong with this – you need it to get moving.
- Each time you breathe out, you activate the part of your nervous system responsible for resting, digesting and healing the body. Your heart rate slows down and your blood vessels widen.
- Breathing in and out at the same rate balances these two parts of the nervous system. When this happens, various other systems of the body begin to work together on a very deep level. They become coherent, which means they form a unified whole, rather than working at cross purposes.

So this breathing practice will harmonise your body's systems, and bring the body and mind into coherence too. You can do this twice a day, or more if you wish. Here's how to do it:



- Lie with your legs higher than your hips, in an 'L' shape. If you're on the floor, you may need a blanket under you (and perhaps over you too, if it's cold). Your calves rest on the chair or bed.
- You can also do this sitting in a chair or on the edge of your bed, with your spine nice and long, your chin slightly tucked in. Rest your hands in your lap, with relaxed arms. Your feet are flat on the floor. You can close your eyes if you wish.
- Rest one hand on your belly and one on your chest. Take a slightly longer, slower breath than normal. Notice how your body moves under your hands as you do this. Your chest will probably rise slightly. You also want your belly to expand too, rather than sucking it in. If your belly expands, this means the big muscle at the bottom of the rib cage attached to the base of the lungs – the diaphragm – is moving down properly and creating a good vacuum, so you draw in lots of air. At the end of your out-breath, the diaphragm is in a bell shape, with the top of the bell pointing up toward the



centre of the chest. At the end of your in-breath, the bell shape has been flattened as the centre of the diaphragm is drawn down.



- Take five slow easy belly breaths like this, feeling your breath with your hands. (Let your out-breaths be normal and easy.)
- Once you've got the hang of belly-breathing, make the in-breaths the same length as the out-breaths. Do this by counting six seconds as you breathe in, and six as you breathe out. If after a minute, six seconds in and six out seems too long, shorten the count to four in, and four out. People over six feet tall can consider building up to a count of seven or eight. But if you're tall and find even counting to six too long, don't worry: start at five or four.
- Take time to find the right count for you. Don't worry if you need to make the count shorter for the first few days. You can gradually start to make it longer.
- Keep going with your coherent breath for 15 minutes, enjoying the simplicity.
- When you finish, be still for a few minutes without counting the breath and just experience how you feel: your body, your thoughts, your breath – how are they?





Voices from the Inside

Recently we've enjoyed talking with lots of people in prison, and some who've been released, while recording their thoughts on yoga and meditation for our new programme on National Prison Radio. The next three pages contain a sneak preview of that programme, which begins in January.

Taking Refuge in Doing Nothing

From HMP Standford Hill

Way back at the start of my sentence, I was talking to a psychologist about how I feel that everything changes. When you're happy it'll change, when you're sad it'll change, everything ends and everything starts and it can go in waves and cycles. And she said it sounds a lot like Buddhism. A few months later I saw a notice about a Buddhist open day in the chapel. There were loads of names on there so I thought I could sign up and just hide at the back, but I was the only one who turned up. So I literally had an hour interview with the Buddhist minister!

I started going regularly. A few years later I went for refuge in the three jewels (a formal way of becoming a Buddhist). It's just helped me to detach from all the rubbish I hold onto that I don't need. At first I didn't feel that it had changed me fundamentally in any significant way, but over time it does. It just kind of makes you relax and you learn not to cling on to the crap that's in your life.

I came across the PPT (Prison Phoenix Trust) at around the same time, when I saw a notice about them in Inside Time. I knew I was stressed, and stress was something I didn't cope well with – it had led to my offence, it had led to a suicide attempt. So I wrote to them because I knew I needed a change. I couldn't do it on my own. If I could have, I wouldn't have ended up in prison. I needed somebody's help.

There was a complete lack of judgement from them. I was going through a lot of problems with judging myself. I never thought I'd be capable of doing what I'd done. And finding somebody who just accepted me for who I am, not what I did, was very different to what was happening in prison, especially at the start of my sentence. The psychologist wanted to know, "What happened, why did you do it?" but the PPT just wrote to me. Just wanting to know who I am. It was a question I wasn't sure how to answer. But writing to somebody and reading about other people helped me to find out who I was.

The meditation started around the time the PPT sent me *Becoming Free*. At first I wasn't sure if I was doing it right, but going to the Buddhist group helped me. There's no real right or wrong way I've found to meditate, it's just what's right for you. There's so many different Buddhist methods. Some people do chanting, some people just sit.

I found that meditation isn't just about sitting down and making a formal time to meditate. You can do it anytime – you just have to engage fully with what you're doing. If you're sweeping the floor but you're thinking about what you're having for dinner, then you're not really sweeping the floor. You can't be doing two things at once – multi tasking isn't good with meditation. How many times have I walked up a flight of stairs and thought, "I don't remember walking up that flight of stairs"? I used to go for four hour drives, and not remember any of it.

Start small



When I'm meditating I'm actually deliberately doing nothing. When I'm doing something, if I just focus on that thing, that helps my concentration. But just doing nothing is really, really difficult. I've got a very active mind, a lot of people do, and it always wants some attention. Something to focus on. And when I'm doing nothing, there's nothing to focus on. I really struggle with that. But now it's something that I really enjoy. And that's not somewhere I've got to, it's somewhere I'm getting to. I'm still on that journey and I think I always will be.

When I get released, my practice is going to change as my daily routine changes. I'm going to have less time for it some days, but I will try and make a conscious effort to have more time for it. I really want to get out, but I'm not really sure about how I'm going to deal with it yet. That's why I've got to keep my daily practice out there, I've got to just make a little time for myself. Even if that means that when I'm going to work and I'm at a

train station, just taking a few seconds to acknowledge where I am and how I am. I don't want to be one of those people who gets on the train and just pulls out his phone. I want to make sure there's always a bit of space. Even if it's just these micro meditations, ten minutes just to check in to where I am and how I'm feeling. That's the time, I can do that everywhere.

If you want to start meditating, start small. Don't sit there and think, "Right, I'm going to meditate for two hours." Because that's hard – your legs will go numb and your bum will hurt. It's just not practical. And don't think you have to sit in full lotus. I can't do it even though I've been meditating for years. Just go small. Find somewhere comfortable. Don't sit back, don't try and be relaxed about it, keep yourself alert but still. Meditation's not about relaxation. It's about being alert and aware. It's more about awareness than relaxation. That awareness can bring relaxation, but it's about becoming aware of the stresses you're living with. It's about letting go of the stress rather than just chilling out.



Bodhidharma, who took Buddhism to China from India, from HMP Wakefield



Cherishing What I Have

From HMP Eastwood Park

I've been doing yoga for over a year now. It's taught me how to stay within my mind, do different stretches, and it's taught me how to meditate. That's now a big part of prison for me, especially when you're on the wing and it could be noisy. It's taught me how to just block out that noise and sit there and be in my own mind, and just think about nothing sometimes. Just be in a happy place.

Yoga's so relaxing. Sometimes when you're out you don't realise how much you're on the go, but yoga has just given me a sense of taking time out and just being calm and collected. It's taught me to take a step back and that sometimes it's okay not to think of anything.

The feeling of yoga will last for the rest of the day, and the weekend, but when Monday comes I'm like, "I need it to be Friday, so I can go to yoga". We've got a lot of books and CDs from the PPT, and sometimes when your mind's going somewhere else you can think "Right, let me open this book, let me put this CD on and just listen to something other than music." It just clears your mind for you.

I used to be very impatient and want everything here and now. In this place you have to learn patience, because nothing comes immediately. I know that with patience you get things gradually. With the working world, you don't always get things right away. You have to save, things come to you slowly and you respect it more. Before, I wanted it *now*, so it was

any means necessary. But you don't give it any thought. All my possessions now, I respect them, I love them.

I have a little Primark blanket that my mum sent in to me. It took ages to get to me, but I waited for it and now I've got it, it doesn't leave me. It's something so small, it's something I wouldn't care about if I was on the out, but it's something that I really cherish now.

I've got a bit of anxiety about coming out, because it's like, what do I do with myself now? I've got a home to go to, so I'm blessed in that department, but would anyone want me to work for them now? I'm coming close to thirty – what is my life going to be like? I don't want to feel like a failure, I want to do something with my life. All my friends and family are going to be out working – what am I going to be doing? Just sitting at home? I don't want it to be like that.

Slowing it Down

Once I was in the corridor talking to my friend and someone said to me, "What did you say?" And I just closed my eyes and took a deep breath and I walked away. As I got down to the bottom of the stairs I actually felt good, because if I'd retaliated that could have been completely different. But because I took a step back I felt like I'd come a long way. The person I was last year, before yoga, would have bit.

When I first came into prison it was

quite late at night. They let this elderly lady into my room – I didn't know that elderly people came to prison. She was so nice and she stayed with me talking for an hour about how it was in here, and it made me feel a bit better. She made me think that prison might not be like what I assumed, and it wasn't.

Yoga and meditation help ease my anxiety about getting out. I think when I do get out and have these worries, I can definitely use the yoga and meditation to put my stress levels down. I don't want it to be a vicious cycle where I haven't got a job and then I revert back to crime to try and make that money to make ends meet, and then coming back to prison. You see it happen, people coming in and out, and I don't want that. I can definitely use the yoga to help me sit back, think, and consider that life could be worse. Because I started yoga in prison I think it will put me back into a place where I've seen people who have it a lot worse, and to know that I'm blessed.

It's very hard in London. You live in a certain estate, and people are on your doorstep. But I do have a lot of good friends that I can focus on, and look up to. And I've learnt patience in here. I can wait until I've got that job, I can save money to get what I want, and even if I do get those urges that I want it now – meditation. Yoga. I'll slow myself down.



What's the Good of Doing Good?



By Lucy

A lot of people in prison tell us how they try to do a good deed every day. A good deed is an act that improves the world for someone else. It can be small or big – even something like stopping by for a friendly chat can have huge positive consequences.

Sometimes children are encouraged to do this, but does the idea have any value for adults? Is it possible to do this in a harsh prison environment?

Not only does doing a good deed help the receiver, it helps you as well. What we focus our attention on is what we will see

more and more of. If we seek opportunities to do something positive, we'll naturally start to notice more positive things in our own lives.

On the next page our friend tells us about teaching a man yoga and the changes he saw in him. He's obviously glad he did that and found it satisfying in its own right. Helping someone who needs it can give you just as much as it gives them. Ultimately, doing something for someone else is satisfying because we cross the imaginary border that appears to separate us. It helps us recognise our

shared life, with all its pains and joys.

A good deed doesn't have to be as dramatic as teaching someone every day or giving away your possessions. It can be a small thing. Here are some ideas from people who've written to us:

- Share canteen items like teabags or sugar
- Be pleasant to a prison officer on a busy shift
- If someone seems sad, ask them what's wrong. Listen to the answer.
- Draw birthday cards for people to send their family.

Battle Plans

From a former prisoner

The first time I did yoga I was super fit, or I thought I was.

I went in to do this yoga class and halfway through I thought, “Oh my God – what have I let myself in for?” I couldn’t believe how difficult it was. And then when I was in prison I realised that the breathing helps do the yoga. When I was stressed in my cell or something was going on, I would start using the breathing to calm me down and calm my thoughts down. The yoga was about just exercising and trying to keep relatively in shape. But the breathing became a great tool for me.

There were a few times I had conflict. Years ago I would have gone and dealt with it, because it’s the law in prison. I would have gone in their cell, I would have confronted them (rightly or wrongly) and then it would have turned into a violent situation. There were lots of situations – people bumping into you on the wing, staring at you, talking behind your back. I used to think that the best thing was to confront it. But then I learnt through the yoga, just go in your cell. Breathe, let it be. Maybe they’re the ones with all the problems. Look at yourself. So then I would look in myself again.

A new journey

When I was on remand, I was transferred to a Cat A prison even though I wasn’t sentenced, because of my behaviour. I was sitting in the prison van and I thought to myself – I need to change my battle plans. I need to fight a new journey. And my new journey was to look into myself and to use the time constructively, and not to fight the system. And so every opportunity I got, I took. Education, meditating, yoga, learning from books, reading new things, just absorbing as much information as I could.

It’s a really sad thing because in prison, you’re wishing your life away. If there was a chance to wake up and have it be five years in the future overnight, a lot of people would take that option. And I decided, no. Everything they’ve got in this system, I’m going to use, I’m going to look for. And that’s going to make me a much better person when I get out. There’s a lot of spare time in prison and you can

sit there, and lie in self pity miserable, bored. You’ll always have bad times. But then you can distract. You can pick up a book, do another course – there’s always something to learn.

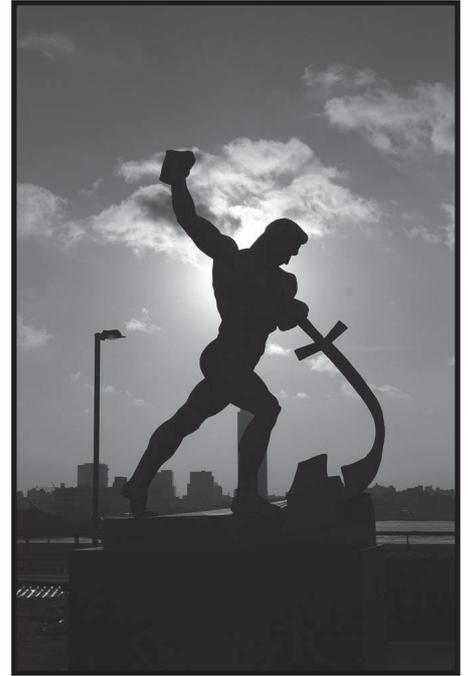
Some people are really scared to leave prison and they’re institutionalised. Their structure’s gone, their three meals a day are gone. It is a fearful thing, coming home. I kept grounded by doing twelve sets of salute to the sun every day in the exercise yard. I’d be breathing, and telling myself, “Keep yourself grounded, keep your feet on the ground. It’s not going to be easy when you come out, it’s going to be really difficult.” I didn’t want to set myself up to fail. I’d changed, and I didn’t want to put all the effort in to change just to pick up all my old habits again. Because then what have I done all that work for, all them years inside?

Back in the real world

On the outside I was so deeply involved in so much no good stuff. I went to prison and that was taken away from me. And I started sleeping again! I was going to explode out there. Something was going to happen – I was either going to die through stress, get killed or go to prison. So I went to prison. And it was probably the best option in the long run.

When you leave prison you have these great intentions – you’re going to do meditating every day, you’re going to do yoga – but all of a sudden you’ll be back out in the real world. And it’s so fast out there. When I got out the technology had changed quite a lot. And it’s easy to forget those things of meditation and things that were massive tools for you in prison, now didn’t seem so significant. And then when things are going well, you can forget more. And it’s only when something bad happens, you think, “Oh my God – the wheels are falling off again”. So then you go and meditate, do yoga. So one thing I learnt in Belmarsh is, you can meditate anywhere. You can meditate on the train. You can just be sitting there. So I don’t lose that tool. That’s a great tool to have.

If someone in prison were to ask me about getting out, I’d say try to be grounded and take small steps every day.



Let Us Beat Swords Into Plowshares
statue at the United Nations Headquarters, New York City

Don’t make these plans about in three months, in six months, you’re going to take your family on holiday. Your family are just happy that you’re there again. Every day, just take a small step and be grounded and patient. Good things will come again, it just takes longer than you expect. It doesn’t happen overnight.

I met a guy in prison who wouldn’t speak to anyone – a real hard case. His whole defence was up massively, and that’s how he’d got through his sentence. No one would talk to him or even look at him. And I thought, “This is a challenge – I’m going to get him to do yoga.”

He was a really strong guy, but I told him he needed to stretch more. And I was out on the exercise yard every day doing yoga myself. And one day he just came along, and that was it. Six months down the line he was out on the exercise yard with me doing yoga every day. And one morning he said to me, “You know what? People are starting to talk to me. People are starting to say how much I’ve changed on the wing, and I’ve made friends. Even prison officers have said how much I’ve changed.” And I felt good about that, because I knew that was the yoga. And that was powerful. It shows that yoga can not just keep you fit, but stretch your mind as well.

Sweet Dreams



By Lucy



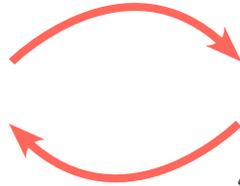
Trouble sleeping is incredibly common, both in prison and on the outside, and can be frustrating and miserable. Luckily, there are steps you can take to help yourself drop off. One of the things people most often say after starting yoga and meditation is that their sleep improves.

Try this routine just before you go to sleep. You may be able to do most of it on your bed. Keep your attention on your breath as you move through these postures and movements. Let us know if they help!

1. Happy Cat Breathe In



2. Angry Cat Breathe Out



3. Child pose



Move between these two postures in time with your breath. Repeat 10 times.

Stay for 5 breaths, or longer if you'd like.

4. Shoulder Circles



Draw big circles with your elbows, slowly and in time with your breath. 10 times each way.

5. Cross legged side bends



5 breaths each side. Feel the stretch along your side.

6. Cross legged twist



5 breaths each side.

7. Cross legged forward bend



Cross your legs and lean forward. 5 slow breaths, then repeat with legs crossed the other way.

8. Supported bridge



Use a pillow or some rolled up jumpers under your hips. Relax for 10 slow breaths.

9. Legs up the wall



Get your bum as close to a wall or door as possible, then put your legs up it. Stay for 30 breaths, or longer if you like.

... and now for sleep.

Lie on your bed like this, or with your hands on your belly, and bring your attention to your breathing. Count your breaths as they flow in and out of you. When you get to 10 breaths, start again from 1. If you get distracted or lose count, bring your attention back to the breath and start again from 1. Do this for 5 minutes, or until you fall asleep.

This breath counting is an effective way of helping you relax and fall asleep, rather than being kept awake by repetitive or worrying thoughts. Even if this doesn't work, remember that you are still resting and nourishing your body and your mind, even though you are awake. *Sweet dreams!*



This newsletter goes to prisoners and prison staff, and to many friends who offer us their encouragement. We receive no statutory funding, but rely wholly on individuals, groups, grant making trusts and faith-based communities who understand the value of meditation and yoga, silence and the breath in empowering individuals and society to heal. Two important ways that friends can help are remembering us in their will and setting up a regular donation. Any support you can offer is greatly appreciated.

Prison Phoenix Trust Newsletter
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registered charity no. 1163558

