



Newsletter, Summer 2017

WHAT IF?



IF THE FOUNDERS OF ALL THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS WERE GATHERED IN ONE ROOM, would they offer to make tea or a meal for one another? Would they ask how each other's families were? Could they form a mutli-faith music group?

Would they be sad about how human beings - our leaders as well as us ordinary people - are carrying on with each other? Or would they remain detached and aloof? Would they encourage anyone who happened to drop in to develop their own hearts and minds to discover the truth that heals and how to live harmoniously?

WHAT IF THE BIRDS and stairwells and clouds and tea mugs were speaking a universal truth to you and it was just a matter of quieting the chatter of your mind until you could hear them?

What if at the end of your life, you realised that of all the things you had ever worried about, not one was actually *worth* worrying about? And what if you could realise that now?

What if it were possible to have relationships based on mutual respect and wishing the best for the other person, without compromising what is right for yourself? What if we human beings could apply that same principle to organisations, to prisons, to prison systems, to governments, to international bodies? What if people were already organising themselves on this principle - if only in small pockets - and we studied and learned from them?

What if all the ideas of who you think you are - bad and good - turned out to be less solid and true than you had believed? What if by looking deeply into these ideas - not with more thoughts, but with a focussed mind that isn't interested in changing anything - you began to see how much they dictate the tone of your life, your actions, further thoughts, further feelings? What if that very seeing changed the nature of those thoughts and

they began to lose power? What if who you truly are can't be captured in words or ideas?

WHAT IF EVERYTHING - INCLUDING YOUR OWN STATES OF MIND - HAD CAUSES AND EFFECTS? Would you act and speak in a way that caused more harmony inside yourself and with the people you live with and with your family and friends?

What if there were help around all the time, even when you were alone? Could you let go of the idea that you can get through tough times by yourself or that no one else is suffering the way that you are, and instead, ask for help through prayer or from a friend or an officer?

WHAT IF ALL PEOPLE - IN PRISON AND OUT, and despite their outer appearances - were struggling with life, with the pain and difficulty of being ill, of getting old, of being with what is unpleasant, of being separated from what they want? Even the person who you find hardest to get along with in your life? Would this make it any easier for us all to get along?

What if, knowing this, you did something each day - no matter how small - for other people, or another living creature?

WHAT IF YOU COULD TRAIN YOUR MIND and cultivate it with patience, practice and support from like-minded friends, so that you could test ideas about life and how to live it, keeping the ones that are true for you, discarding the ones that aren't? What if no one else could tell you what the truth is, but that you had to discover it for yourself?

We hope you enjoy this newsletter, and the summer season of growth, possibilities and exploration.



 **Love Sam – and Lucy, Sally, Jason, Clive, David, Kaye, 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.

“The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.”

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882, American poet



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 Usk

We had a cool surprise that I think stems from your newsletter: an anonymous donor has sent the meditation group here a new singing bowl! I mentioned needing a bell for the meditation sessions I helped to start in the letter you published in your newsletter. It must have been someone reading the newsletter who posted one to us. How cool is that? We are over the moon with it, and especially with the generosity of people outside of the prison system. Every time it is chimed we amplify the loving kindness of this donor. Can you pass along our gratitude to the newsletter readership?

The politics of the meditation group have become a bit fraught so I've had to recruit support. Advertising has stopped and the location and times have been moved around so attendance has been affected. To raise the profile I've enlisted the support of the Social Care people and Buddhist chaplain to sponsor the meditation group and to promote its continuation, schedule and location to the powers that be. I've made a new poster and we're making progress. The wheels of change are old and creaking but we are determined.

One of the new attendees of the meditation group was spotted telling his wife how to do breathing meditation over the prison phone to help her with stress! Prisoners not only helping each other but even those outside of prison. Awesome!

I've wangled my way into the weekly yoga lessons. I'm moving bits of me that I didn't think were supposed to move! It's fantastic moving my breathing meditation practice into my body; it is incredibly profound.



From
HMYOI Polmont

I'm 14 months into my first ever sentence and I'm finding it really, really hard. Three weeks ago the guys from chaplaincy told me about the Friday afternoon yoga classes so I put my name down. To my surprise I actually enjoyed it. I have been every week since and do

some of the meditating moves I learned while I'm sitting in this room. I never thought I would come into prison and start enjoying reading books and doing yoga, but I do. It's something I would like to take up when I'm eventually out. It is very de-stressing, calming, relaxing and takes my mind away from being in here.

I forgot who I was and what I stood for, what my hobbies were for a long time out there. I'm hoping I've found my feet again.

From
HMP Dartmoor

During my second year in prison I started yoga and meditation. I'd heard it was good for the body and also the mind.

Being a regular gym person - circuits and cardio, not body building - I gave it a go. I was instantly hooked. Practising the poses made my body feel good and my mind clear. Two years on and yoga is a part of my daily routine and life: stretches in the mornings, a pose or two in the evenings and throughout the day always being aware of deep breathing. I practise for an hour twice a week. Once mid-week, the other on Sunday morning where I join in with *Freedom Inside* on National Prison Radio at 7 a.m. This keeps me focussed and calm, ready for whatever prison life throws at me, from selfish inmates to a change in regime.

In January I was fortunate to attend a yoga session, where I met Sally and Jason from the PPT, along with Susie and Tony. Sally delivered the session fluently, making the 90 minutes informative and enjoyable. Since then Susie has returned to start weekly sessions. Again I was lucky to be one of six to attend. Susie's teaching style is informative and relaxing and we all agreed the 60 minutes session was great and could have continued for longer. I look forward to next week if chosen.

My yoga and meditation 20-minute presentation for Mrs Barker's "Better Man" class is put together using tips from both PPT books and CDs and from *Freedom Inside* on NPR. I always mention "know your own body" and "any pain is no gain, so don't continue". The learners, including the tutor, join in with gentle poses and breathing exercises. Attempting to balance on one leg always brings a few laughs to each class. I am able to photocopy the leaflet *Stressed? Can't sleep? Head doing you in?* which I hand out to interested people.

Thank you for being there to encourage

Prisoners'

ways of coping with prison life. It is definitely working for me.



From
HMP Greenock

I really look forward to the meditation and yoga part of your newsletter; also the controlled breathing practices. I have always had trouble sleeping in prison, and am serving a three and a half year sentence with 14 months left to go. I have been following the yoga and meditation and I have found I sleep more easier and longer than before.

I also feel as if it has been benefitting me as in the mornings I feel more alert and rested since doing various combinations of these exercises.

From
HMP Sudbury

I am now two thirds of the way through my sentence, but my life isn't on pause.

I continue to rise just before six and begin my day with yoga and meditation before going for a three km run around the grounds. It means that I start the day in a positive way and that helps me carry it through; able to help others when they need support, which in turn makes me feel better that I've made a difference, no matter how small. I have learned new skills in plastering and horticulture, written a book and quit smoking. I have read lots of books that have taken me to other worlds and increased my knowledge, and am currently learning to play guitar. Soon I will begin a TEFL course provided by P.E.T. In years gone by I travelled through India and most of South East Asia. Once my licence has expired I might have the opportunity to use it to teach English which will help to supplement my travels.

My father passed in January. I have nurtured a spider plant from a small shoot to a thing that now fills my window. On the morning my father died, little white flowers came out on it for the very first time! I'm grateful to the prison for giving me the opportunity to attend the funeral.

I'm serving three years for a crime I didn't commit. The first part of my appeal was granted last year. The panel heard the final stage in January and have not yet reached a conclusion so I wait to see if



Letters

my name will yet be cleared or whether I must continue my sentence. All I can do is accept that everything will be for the best in the end. Sometimes what we want isn't the thing we need, so I will take responsibility for making the best of each day regardless of my position.

The yoga classes I set up here at Sudbury have been going for a few months. People seem to particularly enjoy the relaxation at the end.

I am so glad to have found something that I can include in my day for the rest of those that I have.



From
HMP Channings Wood

**A few months back I
got an injury playing
badminton in the sports hall.**

After a few weeks of rest it felt a lot better, but still a bit stiff. I borrowed your book *Freeing the Spirit through Meditation and Yoga*. It has helped me in body and mind, and with the help of the easy, step by step guide I gained a full recovery.

From
Bombat Phiset Prison,
Thailand

**The way I manage
my daily prison
life with my calm mind
and often a smile on my face makes
others think.** They see me doing my 2 p.m. sitting in some corner, and my 5 a.m. sessions of yoga and meditation have been discussed by many inmates. I have learned to overcome noise even at 2 p.m., one of the loudest times in this overcrowded place. Of course, my practice does not feel like a total success every day. There are days when I come out of my sitting thinking, "Why wasn't today as good as yesterday?" I believe that's the road we are on: we grow daily with the effort we put in.

Some three years ago I was happy when I caught a few seconds of peace while meditating. Now I'm sitting mostly in peace. Only on some days do I feel disturbed by either noise or my own mind wandering. The only reason I stick to yoga and meditation is because I feel the changes in me so much. On the very first day I felt something and today, after more than three years, I see the big picture.

The guy I used to be before couldn't



listen to people for long without starting to think of myself and judging, even though the other guy talking had not finished saying what he meant. A couple of days ago someone was telling me a story and I was really listening to him. I felt everything he said and could smile with him. He is not very liked by the other inmates. My old self wouldn't have the joy to listen to him. That used to happen to me a lot before, but no more. I don't remember the last time I didn't feel like listening to someone. I smile at people and they smile back. It feels honest and warm.

That is only one of the things I've noticed but I know there is much more positive change inside me and that makes me keep on loving the yoga and meditation sessions. It's medicine to my soul. No drugs prescribed by any doctor could change a person in such a beautiful way. How I wish the whole world would realise this.

I'm the leader of Friday's morning devotion. I have taken on more responsibility in church as I'm more and more getting to understand Jesus. He was one of us - a spiritual warrior with the ability to make people follow him because of the way he lived. We are like that too.

Meditation Corner

**We often read in your letters how
annoying noise in prisons can
be,** especially when trying to develop a 'silent' meditation practice like the kind we recommend. It can seem that meditation just highlights the vast number of sounds that are happening all the time. With so many people living close by, all the chatter and everyone's different tastes in television, radio and music - and large echoing wings that amplify it all - no wonder 'silence' can be hard to find.

For many years I worked in a factory operating noisy machines cutting steel. Much of the day I wore ear protectors, but the sounds were always there - and even kept ringing when I was at home in bed. The odd thing was this volume of sound was rarely annoying, partly because the cutting sounds were not words. I hated the neighbours on my street playing loud music, the background noise of television and radio, and too much chatter. Sometimes it seems that all these sounds come during meditation, right there at a time guaranteed to annoy us the most!

Thankfully there are ways of dealing

Shhhhh!



By Jason

with all these sounds, and it is not so much the volume and variety of noises, but how we feel about them. Sitting upright, with the ears in line with the shoulders and the chest gently lifted, tuck the chin in a little to raise the crown of your head. Sit comfortably upright and as still as possible - you can easily do this on a chair or maybe the edge of your bunk. Focus upon your breathing as it enters and leaves the nose, and just breathe normally.

You will almost certainly start to hear something: perhaps talking, music or other sounds. You may find that the human voice easily draws your attention away from the breath. If this happens, notice how you immediately start trying to understand what is being said or sung. This can happen really easily with many kinds of music, anything with lyrics - there are so many words coming to our attention

that we
easily lose
attention of
the breath.

The same can
happen with
chatter on the
wing: our minds want to make sense of
the words and the people speaking them.
If you notice this process, return to the
breath and it gradually becomes possible
to see the chatter as 'sound'. You don't
have to become involved. Be patient with
yourself; it might seem like you aren't
'getting anywhere' and that you are
still being drawn away from the breath.
Don't worry. Keep right in there with it,
returning your focus back to the breath.

When you are active around the prison,
you may find you want to take care with
noise. You may find yourself speaking
clearly and simply, and not bothering
with unnecessary chatter. Many will be
quietly grateful - but don't expect this
to be returned! Just develop a broader
tolerance and know that sound has always
been a vital part of being human.





Creating Space

 By Victoria



“Get out of my face! Give me some space!”

If you’ve never said or thought these things yourself then you’ve probably heard someone else shouting them. In times of stress, you might feel the walls closing in: whether it’s a decision that didn’t go your way; worries about your family; or the noise on the wing is just too much today. You wish it would go away, or that you could grab a remote control and get the world to ‘pause’.

The pause button that you wish for is available, but you won’t find it outside of yourself. To create that space you can call on three things that are always with you: your body, breath and mind. These tools will help you create some space, even in a tiny cell.

Try this breath and movement exercise to help create a sense of space. It’s worth spending a few minutes first clearing away any visible clutter in your room. Maybe open a window, make your bed, and clean your ashtray if you smoke.

- Find a place in your room where you have enough space to stretch your arms out in front of you and out to both sides.

- Stand up straight with your feet hip distance apart so you feel steady and grounded. Have your arms relaxed by your sides and check that your shoulders aren’t hunched and your head isn’t tilted.



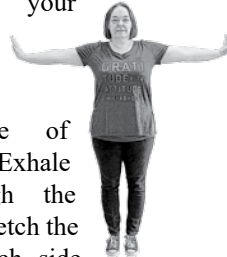
- If it feels comfortable, close your eyes. If not, try lowering your gaze to a spot on the floor a few feet in front of you. Now take three sighing breaths: breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth with a soft ‘ahhh’ sound.



- Inhale through your nose and bring your palms together at the centre of your chest. Exhale slowly and softly through the mouth as you stretch the arms out in front of you with the palms facing forward.



- Inhale through your nose and bring your hands back together at the centre of your chest. Exhale steadily through the mouth as you stretch the arms out to each side with palms facing away to the left and right.



- Inhale through your nose and bring your hands back together at the chest. Exhale through the mouth as you press the arms downward towards the floor, with palms facing down.



- Inhale through your nose and bring your hands back together at the centre of your chest. Exhale slowly and softly through the mouth as you press the arms towards the sky with palms facing up.



- Inhale, returning your hands back to your heart and pause for a couple of normal breaths.



- Try 2 more rounds and see if you can allow the different arm movements to respond to your breathing rather than making your breath fit in with what your body is doing.
- After 3 rounds sit or lie on your back for a few minutes.

- Investigate how you feel. How is your breathing? How is your mind? If you feel a little calmer then this might be a good time to meditate, but give yourself permission to rest and appreciate the space, without words or labels.

Enhancements:

For the body: try and keep your shoulders relaxed and don’t lock the elbows or bring too much tension into your arms and wrists as they move through the actions. (Think Tai Chi rather than Bruce Lee!)

To go deeper, mentally: on each in-breath focus on your hands coming back together and connecting with your heart. On each out breath, as you move the arms outwards, have the idea that you are creating a safe and positive space around you, rather than pushing the world away.

Benefits:

This exercise is helpful if you’re feeling overwhelmed by thoughts or feelings, or frustrated by the physical reality of living in close quarters. The slow steady movements on each part of the breath help to deepen the breath. Slower, deep breathing begins to lower the heart rate, switching the nervous system into the ‘rest and digest mode’ which calms both the body and the mind. By paying close attention to the movements and sensations in the body and applying the mind intentions, you develop better concentration and find you can begin to switch off intrusive and repetitive thoughts.

Variations:

This exercise works just as well on a chair. Sit towards the front of the seat and make sure your feet are firmly planted on the floor.

“When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves.”

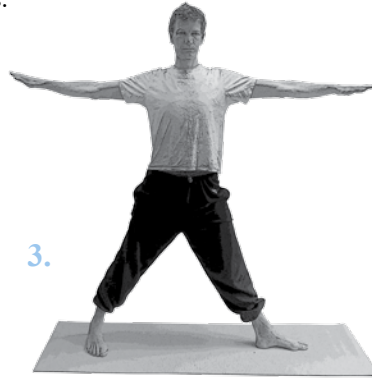
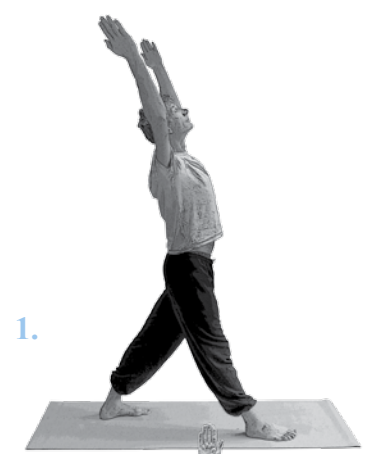
~ Viktor E. Frankl, 1905 - 1997, neurologist and Holocaust survivor

Stretch it Out

 By Brent

These movements stretch and lengthen the back of your body, though you may feel it in other areas of your body too. I find it works well to move in time with your breathing. As a rule of thumb, breathe in when you're opening up or stretching out, and breathe out when you're folding in or curling down. You may do the sequence (1-14) more than once and see if you prefer moving in rhythm with your breathing or staying for a few breaths in each position.

In picture 15 you can lie for up to 5 minutes.



The Kindness of Lament

by the Rev. Joe Hensley

Joe Hensley is Rector of St. George's Episcopal Church, Fredericksburg, Virginia in the U.S., and on the Human Kindness Foundation (HKF) Board of Directors. The HKF is an American organisation which encourages prisoners to use their time for focussed spiritual growth. This article was originally published in the HKF newsletter. © Human Kindness Foundation, www.humankindness.org

“What do we do now?”

In the wake of tragedies that shake the core of our communities and nations, this question shakes our souls. After the violence last year in Orlando, Baton Rouge, St. Paul, Dallas, France, Syria, and so many other places, there have been calls for prayer and cries of mourning for those lost. At the same time, almost immediately after a tragedy, fingers are pointed and leaders repeat ad nauseum that we need to come together and solve the problems. Of course we want and need to respond, even when the tragedies may be far away from us. Rushing to solutions, though, may mean missing the deeper need for healing. What do we do now? We first need time to be sad and space to be angry. We need time and space to lament.

Lament is a word we do not use very much, as we have neglected its importance. Lament is not just being sad. In its roots, it means “to wail.” Wailing carries all kinds of emotions that we need to express if we are to heal: confusion, sadness, frustration, even anger. When we lament, we give voice to those emotions and let them lead us, eventually, toward hope. We hear this so often in the prayers of the Hebrew Bible known as the Psalms. Psalm 22 begins with this famous lamentation: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” After many verses of despair, the poet eventually turns the corner toward hope in God’s mercy: “You are my strength...” Blues music is another example of the hopeful power of lament. Even as the singer wails about lost love or tough times, the cadence and melody of the music lifts the heart to face another day.

Too often though, the voices of lament are squelched in the aftermath of a tragedy. America, especially, tends more toward an attitude of fortitude. Rather than sing the blues at memorials and vigils, we sing patriotic and hopeful tunes to inspire us to stay strong and forge ahead. Even the song “We Shall Overcome,” which I love for its amazing capacity to bring people together in hope, does not mention sorrow. Protesters take to the streets,



At a vigil for victims of the shooting last year in Orlando, Florida

but anger and sadness often give way to confrontation instead of consolation. There are few spaces where it is okay to fall apart and wail. There are few people who will just listen without trying to convince us that our crying is somehow out of place.

When we rush to action without taking the time to mourn and feel the pain of loss, we tamp down an essential part of the healing process. We are afraid of the emotions, maybe because they seem depressing. It is actually more depressing when we stuff away our sadness. Our society is in many ways depressed. We talk about meaningful change but just cannot seem to make it happen. The way for individuals and society to heal from depression is to shine a light on the sadness, not push it away.

Maybe the greatest kindness we can offer in these troubled times is to welcome a cry of lament. Our first impulse may be to rush to “fix it,” but kindness is deeper than offering fast solutions. The kindness of lament is the space and permission to be human and to mourn without harm or judgment. Lament does not seek to hurt another. Its purpose is healing of the soul. “What do we do now?” We fall apart, and then we pick up the pieces together. Lament is not a downward spiral of negativity. It moves downward at first and then turns toward hope.

How do we show each other this kindness? We first need to give ourselves permission to lament.

This does not mean we have to cover our heads in ashes or make some public display, although it might take some outward form. For me, just the awareness of my own voice sighing within me connects me, in a physical way, to the sound of the world’s suffering. When someone else is expressing their pain, we can simply listen. We can say, “I know it hurts.” We can offer a cup of water, a tissue, a safe place to wail, even when it is hard to hear. We can resist the temptation to rush to solutions or tell people to be quiet. We can create safe places in the community where this wailing can happen uninterrupted. Even if someone else’s pain is not something we personally experience, we can lament in solidarity. The reality of pain and loss is common to us all.

Breathe deeply. Welcome the moaning and groaning. Lament is kindly reminding us that we are human. Hope will arrive too, but it might take its time. Our impatience for results may actually work against deeper solutions. The kindness of lament requires a willingness to wait and trust. Maybe this is the meaning behind Psalm 30:5: “Weeping needs to endure for a night, so that joy can come in the morning.”

New PPT Book!

Peace Inside joins our other free books for people in prison

The grit, hope and revelations of prisoners' spiritual journeys were what sparked the Prison Phoenix Trust into existence 29 years ago. In a new book *Peace Inside: a prisoner's guide to meditation*, we've collected a small sample of prisoners' letters and replies from the Trust in which they explore their paths through meditation. It is both a guide and a moving account of different individual's successes and struggles as they learn to meditate and make sense of their life and prison experiences.

Feedback from prisons has been positive. In HMP Usk, a prisoner (see his letter on page 2) lent the book to a friend who had been struggling. He wrote, "He came back in an hour, tears in his eyes, pointing to a passage he'd found, saying, 'This is me! How did they know?' He was deeply affected by what he read and will be taking that copy with him as he's transferring soon." Another friend, now released, said, "Thank you for putting together an empowering collection of guidance and experiences that I have no doubt will help others in their difficult time. The letters remind me that each prisoner faces a very similar turmoil. Many of the contributors have been so brave to seek help in their darkest time. I hope they all made it through okay."

Here is an excerpt from the first part of the book, written by Sam, the PPT's Director:

As you can see from the letters in this book, so many people who have taken up this inner search have said that even though they are in prison, they have found this deep, true place in themselves, and that they are free. It's funny to have to go to prison to find freedom inside. Most people don't get any break from the madness and challenges of day to day living. Yet countless people testify that the practice of meditating while in prison and afterwards has led them to feel more at ease with who they are, and because of that they feel more connected and less separate from the world around them.

Three things motivate me in my work with the Prison Phoenix Trust. The first is

you, living in the intense mental pressure cooker that is prison, and the inspiring ways that so many of you manage to find a sense of freedom. So a big part of this book is letters from prisoners, and people now out of prison. As you read them, I hope you'll see that inner freedom is possible, but that it doesn't always look like what you expect, and it isn't the same for everyone.

The path of freedom is not always easy – it's often three steps forward and two steps back – but it's one worth walking. And as you read the letters, you'll see

that despite it feeling like a slog at times, it brings deep and consoling satisfaction. Maybe it's a path you're already on. If so, respect and greetings.

The second thing that motivates me is the tried and tested practice of meditation and yoga. The letters from people who are committing themselves to these practices in a serious way are inspiring, especially when they feel their lives have begun to shift in a direction that they like and which feels a million times freer and more harmonious and more open to possibilities than before.

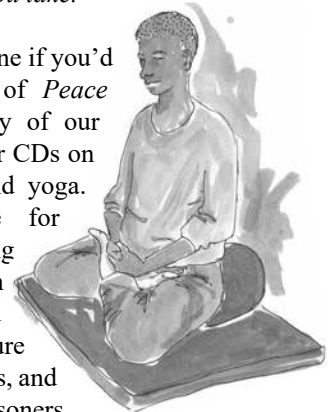
Interested? You'll find instructions on meditation, to help your mind and heart become clearer and quieter by concentrating on your breathing, later on.

... The third thing holding this book together is friendship. At its most basic level, friendship is the fundamental human act of reaching out past yourself to

the other, going past apparent differences to find the common ground that is always here, connecting us to everyone and everything. This is both the starting point and the end of any path of change. You'll see that for many people in prison who have written over the years, finding ways of 'being there' for other people has helped them tap into something deeply human, bringing to life the connection and lack of separation that the practice is all about.

... Whether you've been doing meditation for years or are brand new to it, know this: you are not alone. Throughout UK and Irish prisons, and in jails around the world, thousands of people delve deep into themselves by making the time to sit still in silent meditation each day. An even vaster number outside of prison put aside part of their day to do this too. And when you sit in meditation, know that you are not just with others but with the whole of creation, never separate. I hope this become more and more a wordless truth that seeps deeper into your bones with each breath you take.

Drop us a line if you'd like a copy of *Peace Inside*, or any of our other books or CDs on meditation and yoga. They're free for people living or working in prisons and other secure establishments, and for former prisoners.



Christmas Card Competition

Could you design this year's Christmas card?

Every year we produce a Christmas card to sell to our supporters. It's always drawn by a prisoner and reflects our work in some way - like the snowman yogi (last year's winner) or a general image with a theme of hope and peace. These cards raise much needed funds for our work and spread awareness of what we do. Every card a supporter sends is

an opportunity for a new person to find out about us.

Send us your images before September 1st for a chance to be featured on this year's card! All entrants get two free packs of 10 cards. We look forward to seeing your entries!



La Alegría de Servir a Otros

or The Joy Of Serving Others



Fifteen and a half years ago I was arrested on the charge of murder and taken to HMP Brixton. I knew that if I was to get through the coming challenge of years and years inside I would have to look after myself in both body and mind. I was given the address of your charity and wrote and quickly received your yoga book and CD.

Alas, at the time I was fighting extradition to Spain where I was to stand trial. I had a mental breakdown and forgot about your book. At the time my command of the Spanish language was very weak and as I was the only Englishman in that prison was very much alone. I spent my time doing nothing but yoga and breathing exercises. I was in a 5,000 man prison spending 12 hours daily on a 1,000 man massive prison yard so quickly found my own shaded corner and began practising beginners' yoga. I took a lot of negative remarks in a language I didn't know but I just concentrated on my yoga and breathing.

Over a period of a few months I became

quite advanced and in all honesty that book became my life, keeping me alive in those dark scary days. Before long the negative jibes became encouragement as I became better and stronger. Before too long a few guys had started to stand behind me and copy the moves. I realised that without properly learning the correct breathing and beginners' moves the men would not get the full benefit and could even hurt themselves.

My guys

I got a Spanish friend who spoke a little English to write a message to say that if anyone was interested then to sign their name. The prison governor heard what I was up to and sent for me. I was afraid he was going to stop me before I'd even begun. To my utter delight he told me that if I got more than 25 men interested, he would let me have one of the education classrooms on the yard. The only thing I had to do was learn Spanish. Once I'd learnt to speak their language he wanted

me to also teach English to the convicts. In Spanish prisons it is very rare for foreigners to have work, but here I was being offered the chance to be put on the payroll as an English teacher, and have a class to teach yoga. I (like many convicts) didn't have much of an education and never in a million years thought I'd ever want to "educate" others, but I wanted this more than anything I'd ever wanted.

I worked hard to learn Spanish and "passed out" in only six months, and was given my classroom along with brand new camping mats, exercise books, pencils and a CD player for my collection of relaxation CDs. For the very first time in my life I felt wanted. Before too long I had 30+ guys in my yoga class and 45 in my English classes. After a year my guys sat their English exams. Was I nervous or what? I cannot express how fantastic I felt when 17 of "my guys" passed!

That book and CD you gave me changed my life on so many levels. Because of it I learnt Spanish. Because of it I received a wage. Because of it my self esteem grew to a level it had never been. Because of it I was healthier in body and mind than I'd ever been before. Because of it (without being over dramatic) I'm alive today.

I've gone on to pass many educational exams in Spain and back here - including my GCSEs and two Open University degrees. I've kept my mind strong (and sane), and all because of your little book.

So a massive thank you - from me and all I've taught.



Montserrat, near Barcelona

“No one has ever become poor by giving.”

~ Anne Frank, 1929 - 1945, Holocaust victim and diarist

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. 1163558*

