



Newsletter, Autumn 2011

CHASING THE HIGH

“Ever feel like you just gotta have something – and maybe you are willing to try almost anything – that can really sock it to you! And satisfy you like nothing else ever has or ever could?” A friend in HMP Armley (Leeds) said this recently. At 44 years old, he says he still feels like a boy at times, full of mischief, seeking excitement. He knows that this always lands him in trouble, but can’t see a way through. “I guess I need to find another sort of stimulation, or live without it, which I don’t think is possible unless you want to become a vegetable.” I loved his letter, because he is aware of what is going on for him and admits it’s a struggle. Also he explains so well the desire that many of us have – inside or outside prison – for something different, something stimulating, something other than what is.

He says meditation and yoga don’t do it for him: “They calm me down, but they don’t stimulate me.” But, he goes on, “The calming effect is good enough... I don’t want to spoil what I have.”

Meditation and yoga can indeed calm you down. Peace is a powerful side effect not to be knocked. But the real power of these ancient practices is helping you see yourself – for yourself – as you actually are. And this is incredibly stimulating.

Some of the calmness that comes from these practices is necessary so we can look and see what is happening with our own life and experience, as it happens each moment. The reason that the Trust encourages people to take up a practice of seated meditation each day, whether for five minutes, 30 minutes, or two hours or more, is because through this daily practice, seeing becomes easier – the mind develops the habit of paying

attention.

Although it does involve sitting still, it is stimulating because you learn a massive amount about yourself. What more interesting topic could there be? You see how clever the mind is in avoiding sticking with one thing – the breath – and you get to know and be with it. But you also get to see how what you took to be “me” and “mine” are not quite so easy to label as “me” and “mine”, not when you look carefully. You do still exist – no doubt – but not in the way most of us think. That shift in understanding something we’ve taken for granted our whole lives is incredibly freeing. And once our minds begin to clear some of the rubbish that we carry around in it, we feel lighter.

There is something about the process of looking deeply at ourselves that can help us to heal. Seeing or feeling that shift happen is itself exciting, a real high, because you see that you are acting or thinking about

certain things with freedom, where before you might have felt trapped or limited, or uncomfortable.

So meditation and yoga do offer the chance for real stimulation. But in fact, sometimes life is just quiet, confusing, or not going the way you want it to. But the clearer seeing that anyone can cultivate helps us more and more to remain in those difficult patches, without needing to seek stimulation elsewhere.



Relaxed and loose at HMP Dumfries



Love Sam – and Luisa, Jason, Elaine, Lucy, Kaye, Clive & David



“ Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower. ”

- Albert Camus

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-focused 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, newsletters, free taster workshops and weekly classes.



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Feel like writing? We are happy to help
in any way we can with your yoga and meditation.



Prisoners'



From HMP Whitemoor

How inspired I was when I read the articles from your last newsletter. I meditate every day and can no longer imagine life without it any more than I can imagine not eating. As I did the "Ocean Breath" I could almost taste the salt as I recalled the rolling waves on a southern Spanish shore. I felt refreshed, mindful and full of positive energy.

The article by Ross Faulkner, "What happens when you slow down" caught my attention. In particular the end piece about how he placed a towel over the display panel of the rowing machine to change his experience. I jog every week and normally stare attentively at the numbers on the panel as I burn off 600 calories in 30 minutes, motivated by my performance stats. I threw my prison towel over the numbers and ran "blind". In the beginning I felt agitation as I did not know how much time I had spent running or at what speed or incline level I was at. I felt my heart beating faster, the opposite of what I was trying to achieve. I began to feel more stress in my running and lifted the towel to check what I was doing – only 6 minutes 20 seconds!

This was not what I had expected. I dropped the towel back over the display and brought my mind under control, focusing on myself, sitting wrapped in an orange prison blanket, like a monk in a tranquil garden. I began to disconnect from the noises and smells of the gym. I began to feel lighter and my breathing became more regular. Suddenly I felt new energy pour into me and I wasn't even conscious of my legs pumping and straining under me. Before I knew it the machine was slowing down as it

entered the auto cool down period. I became aware of my surroundings and looked around with a foolish grin on my face. I was hardly perspiring at all and my heartbeat was lower than normal – thanks Ross, great advice!

I encourage other inmates to meditate. It's so much more productive than simply pumping iron and chugging protein shakes but of course each person must be free to choose how they live.

From HMP New Hall

As a lifer prisoner, I've served 12 years out of 14 and am waiting to be moved to HMP Foston Hall. I've always loved to meditate. It is relaxing and it helps to clear my mind. It has also helped me to stop smoking. Yoga has helped me to stay in shape, mind and body. A group of us get together to meditate and to do yoga. These are the best exercises ever to relax from all stress.



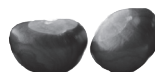
From HMP Bronzefield

The book and CD have been so helpful. I never thought yoga and meditation would be helpful, but I've been doing them for two months now, two or three times a week. At first I found it a bit embarrassing but now I find myself more confident and stress free.



From HMP Dovegate

Having been practising meditation and yoga for about three months, I must say it has helped clear my mind and I am able to



remain calm in stressful situations. My concentration has improved and I am able to complete tasks that would otherwise have been thrown to one side and forgotten about.

From HMP Wandsworth

Becoming Free is really a useful book to follow with the pictures being a perfect guide to correct postures every morning. I just wonder where the guy in the pictures got his MC Hammer pants from! And *We're All Doing Time*: that book really is a treasure trove. It's timeless and full of love, answers and spiritual guidance. Just reading the book got me hooked. It has opened a new path in my journey and has changed my life more than anything else. I'm more focused than ever.



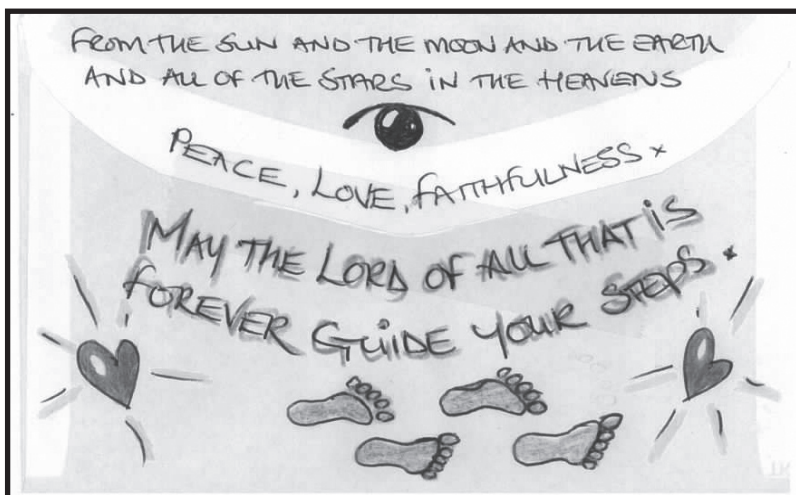
I'm now waiting to hear whether I have got a job as a Toe-by-Toe mentor to help other inmates with literacy and numeracy. I'm receiving lots of love from friends and family, even the prison officers. All the love I give out seems to be coming back in all directions bringing hope and both physical and spiritual healing. My hunger for more keeps growing by the day.

From HMP Usk

I read with great interest your article in *Inside Time* and have already started putting the yoga asanas into practice. I have been practising yoga now for about three months and have noticed a huge difference in my general health and well-being, both externally and internally. Rising early, meditating! Yoga! Keeps me in tune to everything in and around me. It doesn't manifest overnight but the rewards are deep and fulfilling. The prison routine can really cause depression and a feeling of hopelessness and despair. But going inside helps with the daily goings on outside. It's like being in the prison but not of the prison.

From HMP Wymott

At first when I started to get into the yoga positions from *Freeing the Spirit through Meditation and Yoga* and started to meditate I felt a little silly but now since I started it I've come off my anti-depressants and am feeling good.



Envelope from HMP Dovegate

Letters

I feel refreshed and more confident.

From HMP Wakefield

I am still doing my yoga and meditation regularly. It's part of my daily routine and really helps me get through my day, stress free. I have learned what patience is. I've found peace, hope, patience, joy, happiness and all these things in myself.



From HMP Maidstone

I was a wreck when I came in but thanks in part to the staff and officers here and the first prods you guys gave me I'm like another person.

I've been Buddhist for 18 months, do my own yoga and meditation programme and have found a peace I didn't believe I ever would, especially after my beautiful wife Kelly died at just 27, three years back.

I never would have begun this journey, met Bernie or Kerry – our Buddhist chaplain and yoga teacher – both wonderful people. I never would have faced and understood the rage that led to my offence or seen myself as a human

being and not a waste of space.

I just received your summer newsletter, a breath of fresh air for us men and women in prison who a lot of society think are sub-human. I'll be heading back into my life armed not with a defensive, paranoid fear for the future, but as a hopeful, spiritual, happy and grateful human being.

I've put on two stone of healthy weight, I can run 10km in under an hour. I've just finished a Creative Writing BA (Hons) and I'm on wonderful terms with my Mum, so if yoga doesn't work (along with meditation) I hope it keeps on 'not-working' lol!

From HMP Nottingham



Thank you for the book *Freeing the Spirit through Meditation and Yoga*.

I have started to use meditation mainly when extremely stressed. I was sentenced last week and was really uptight. 10-15 minutes meditation in the holding cell, I was relaxed. It works. Not tried many yoga poses yet even though I recognise a few from the Wii Fit games.



From HMP Cardiff

I wrote to you about five or six months ago for some help to rid me of some of my pain and anxiety. The book *We're All Doing Time, A guide for getting free*. I'm just over 40 years old and have never picked up a book in my life. Your books have given me an understanding on how a normal brain should work. I've been on drugs and alcohol since I was 16. Never had an open mind like I have now. Please could you send me the books *Light*, *Sitting in Light* and *Just Another Spiritual Book*. They sound as if they go a little bit deeper into your soul.



Meditation Corner

Three Second Sit



By Jason

The other day I overslept and only had twenty minutes to get to work. I skipped breakfast, jumped on my bicycle and pedalled like the clappers. Each morning we sit in meditation for 30 minutes before work and I knew I would miss most of the sit. When I arrived at the office I crept into the meditation room where a small group of staff were silently meditating. I unobtrusively found a space to sit and I was just about to focus on my inhalation when the finishing bell sounded. It was 9 am. I had sat for all of three seconds.

Can anything useful happen in three seconds? Can the mind settle in such a short space of time? Well that day, I told myself, it certainly must: after all, stillness is only a breath away. But I felt flustered after oversleeping and arriving late.

However, over the next few hours this changed. Although meditation is

concerned with letting go of thoughts, it is good to recognise that thoughts appear because we have a large brain which is designed to think. And like all things connected with our bodies, it takes time for the chemicals and processes to adjust. Perhaps this is why it took me a few hours to settle into the day. It largely depends on the activity you do before meditation, and this is why yoga exercises go so well with meditation. You can also try sitting in silence after a hard session at the gym – it can be interesting to observe how there are often fewer thoughts and worries, especially if you've been concentrating on the breath and not on achieving something (see Mark's letter opposite). The energy is diverted into exercising and the brain is less prone to imaginative thinking.

So what about those meditation masters who spend hours and days in deep

meditation? It is probably best not to contemplate their abilities and needs – after all this is just another process of thinking and comparing, which will probably lead to feelings of being inadequate. Fifteen minutes is a good length of time, and twenty-five minutes each day is even better.

It seems that this three second sit was not in vain after all. It's good to recognise that sometimes the length of time we have available is beyond our control, and even a tiny period of time gives rise to something useful.



Tight hips? Try this.



By Elaine

In the spring issue of this newsletter, we asked for yoga postures you know help with gym work. A prisoner from HMP Gartree sent in posture 8 saying, “It will stretch the gluteal muscles, hamstrings and hip flexors.” Here, we’ve added other postures that help the hips. Running, cycling and sitting for a long time can make your hips feel stiff if you don’t look after them. This routine will rotate, flex and extend your hips, helping them to remain agile. We suggest five slow breaths or repetitions for most postures, but stay longer if you wish.



1 Pull your heels in towards your bum. Drop your knees out to the sides and press the soles of your feet together. Keeping the outer edges of the feet firmly on the floor and your back straight, hold your feet. Sit like this quietly. Don’t worry how far down your knees go. Just be patient, breathe naturally and focus on your breath.



2 Lie on your back. Take a breath in. Breathe out slowly and raise your right leg. Draw in your belly to stabilise the lower back. When you breathe in again, lower the leg, breathing slowly. Do this five times.



4 Bring both knees in towards the chest and hold each knee with a hand. Circle them by bringing the knees together and towards your head, and then apart as they go back towards your feet. Circle 5 times. Then change direction.



6 Gently bring your knees together, roll off to the side and sit up. Come into a squat, and stay here, balancing and focusing on your breathing, for 5 breaths.



7 While you’re in the squat, place your finger tips on the floor in front of your toes. Slowly straighten your legs, with the fingers still on the floor. You can keep your legs bent if you need to – the important thing is that you bend from the waist, not the back. Stay like this for 5 breaths.

9 Lie on your back again. Have your arms out to the sides at shoulder height, and put your feet flat on the floor with your knees and feet together. Take a breath in and when you breathe out, move both knees over to the right. Look off to the left hand. Breathe in, come back up, and out, over to the right side. Move with the breath like this 3 more times. Then on the 4th time, just stay on the right side and stay for 5 breaths. And then again on the left side.



10 Lie on your back and relax, keeping your attention on the breath and letting all the tension go from your body, especially on each out-breath. Stay here for as long as you like, but at least 5 minutes.

Out of sight, but not out of mind



By A PPT Volunteer

One of my relatives was a sailor, who spent long stints at sea, far from home. He said at first, when he was out of sight of land, he felt like he was disappearing, bobbing alone on an uncaring ocean. The loneliness was really bad and he couldn’t shake it off for many months.

Some of his friends and family wrote to him (this was before the internet) to say they were taking time each day to hold him in mind. This helped him feel better, but the loneliness was still sometimes hard to be with.

One day, he decided to flip things around and begin holding other people in mind and simply wishing them well. First he took a few minutes on those people who he cared about and loved,

then people who he didn’t feel strongly about one way or another, and then he wished well those people he didn’t like – people who’d caused him trouble. Finally, he did this for every living thing in the entire universe. His loneliness vanished soon after he began doing this. He was never able to explain how it worked, but knew without a doubt that it did.

Whether or not you are feeling lonely, you might want to try holding in mind – or is it your heart? – those who are near and not so near to you. It may bring surprising results, whether to you or those you hold in your heart.



3 Bring your right knee in towards your chest with your hands on your knees. Flex your heels away on both feet and take five breaths. Then repeat steps 2 and 3 with the left leg.



5 Place your feet on the ground near your bum, with the feet and knees together. Let your knees move apart towards the floor. Place rolled up towels or something of equal height just below the hip joint, so your legs have something to relax into. Stay for 10 breaths, five minutes or longer if you wish.



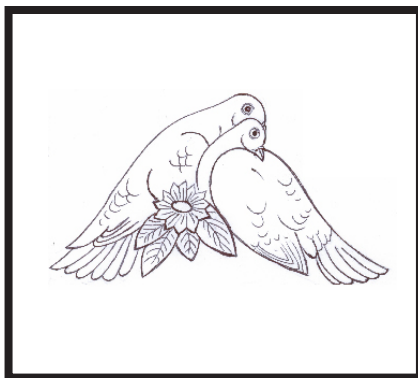
8 Bend your knees and put your hands on the floor, on the outside of your feet. Step back with your right leg into a lunge. Put your right knee on the ground and lift your chest. Stay here for 5 breaths.

Step back into the forward bend and
c h a n g e
sides, so
it's your
left knee on
the ground.
Stay for
another 5
breaths.

PPT Christmas card returns!

This beautiful black and white Christmas card drawn at HMP Wakefield was so popular last year that we are making it available again this Christmas. The inside message is from the poet William Wordsworth: "The best portion of a good man's life, his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love."

There is plenty of space for your own message. The 4.25" square cards are £5 for a pack of 10 and £3 for each additional pack. To order, send this form with payment to: The PPT, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF. If your prison is sending payment for you, you still need to send us the form. Many thanks to Reg for his support of the Trust.



Spotlight on the Spirit

Many Paths

By Ash Hussain, yoga teacher at Ellison House bail hostel

When I teach at Ellison House, I make it known to people that I'm a Muslim. If I have Christians who I'm working with and I think they might benefit from going to church, I suggest that to them.

Not that I'm trying to preach Christianity, but I do think that if people are asking religious questions, the first place they should look is the faith they were raised in. Once I was treating a young Sikh man who was rehabilitating from serious drug addiction. I asked my mentor what to do and he said, "Send him to a Gurdwara (Sikh temple)."

My mentor, now dead, was an amazing man, a high court judge named Norman. He was also a Quaker. His two daughters go into prisons to visit and teach. He shared such amazing perspectives on life. I remember especially him reminding me that we are all tenants of the same earth.

Once I went into a women's prison, to accompany a lady with the toddler child of the prisoner we were visiting. The lady and I weren't treated especially courteously, which was okay, but what did shock me was the lack of any compassion or consideration shown to the 18-month old child. She was not allowed to be with her mother alone, which didn't seem right. I felt quite intimidated. I know that things



may well have improved since then, but the memory stays with me.

Ellison House hostel where I teach is much more pleasant. I find people open to positive change. I had been working with one man for some weeks and he told me, "I don't want to know about all the good work you do. Don't mention the church to me." That took me aback. Two months later, as he was about to leave the hostel, he said to me, "Ash I want to do what you are doing." I said "Be a yoga teacher?" He said, "I want to help other people. I want to get them to the stage where they can say that the world is not a bad place." So something had shifted.

Getting Muslims in through the door to the yoga class is the hardest thing, so I modify my class to minimise the possibility for offence. The same goes for whoever is in my class. We don't do chanting for example, or change it to Shalom instead of Om if that's appropriate.

I'm always interested in the paths people take as their spirituality deepens. I know one Saudi-born Muslim who wasn't particularly religious, but after taking up yoga, did become religious. She went to her imam and asked him how to pray the two units of prayer. As they were talking, she showed him one way to bow which she had learned through yoga, and was completely acceptable in the mosque. He began using this slightly modified way, and his back problems disappeared. Proper prayer does work!

Christmas Card Order Form

- Please send me 1 pack of 10 cards at £5.
- Please send me ___ additional packs of 10 cards at £3 per pack.
- I enclose a cheque payable to The Prison Phoenix Trust for £ _____.

Name _____

Prison number (if in custody) _____

Address _____

Post code _____

☐ I've ticked this box because I've requested my prison to send you payment.

Breathing life back in

By Greg

At a recent Prison Phoenix Trust fundraising event, Greg spoke to a captivated audience about doing yoga and meditation while in prison, and his life now. This is an extract from that talk.

My life before prison was a mess. My priorities were completely disordered, and I was caught in an unhealthy relationship with money and ambition. It all led to the poor life choice selling drugs. In one way prison came as a relief from that.

No matter how well or badly the prison service addresses practical issues such as preparing inmates for employment or tackling offending behaviour, they did little to address my emotional and spiritual needs. Many of the people I met inside had upbringings which only detached them from spirituality and left them emotionally twisted and lost. There were times when there was no one on my wing with whom I could relate or talk to about my issues. I found myself holding in my emotions, holding firm and bottling things up. The positivity I brought in from the outside world evaporated very quickly, especially amongst the frustration and uncertainty of the remand wing. I consider myself to be fairly good at managing my emotions but in this environment it became very difficult for my moods not to be affected by this isolation, and myself and everyone else, inmates and staff, passed around negativity under the dark cloud of incarceration.

Learning of and making contact with the Prison Phoenix Trust was a complete breath of fresh air. Writing to the PPT I got a calm and compassionate set of ears with a reasoned and positive response. They were breathing back in a little positivity in the prison through me. Even one voice of moderation can positively affect a whole wing. It wasn't just the friendship that helped me.

The book *We're All Doing Time* really helped me to remember to see prison as an opportunity as well as helping me make the most of that opportunity. It's an amazing book.

There are many debilitating effects prison had on me. Mentally

I had an overwhelming sense of frustration and disempowerment. I felt like I was constantly battling just for the basic space and support I needed. Physically I felt cramped and I got digestive problems from the food. I was aching from the poor mattresses and beds. I felt lonely from the lack of physical contact and loving companionship. Yoga and meditation helped me with all of these things.

To begin with there were no yoga or meditation classes in Bullingdon where I spent most of my time, and there was little help from the library on spiritual pursuits.



Greg on a lunch break from work

The PPT books were the best available, but I craved a class where I could learn properly and practise in quiet. Fortunately I had a chance to help start a yoga class and a great teacher came in each week. Any moments of solitude were like gold dust. Yoga breathed life back into my tired body, and meditation allowed me to escape the bars. I was lucky enough to have learnt some meditation and yoga before I went into prison but I felt sorry for others who hadn't. I wanted to share both yoga and meditation because I knew how much they helped me.

Meditation has completely transformed my life. By allowing my mind to become quiet, I find that the events of my life fall into line. I can see more clearly what the really important things in life are. I realised while meditating that money was a false idol. Listening to the voice of reason within it seemed obvious. I was a bit disappointed in myself for never giving

myself the time to stop and think before. I got a sense of the journey I'm on, where I've been and a better picture of where I want to go. I feel compassion, patience and tolerance, three of the most important attributes for staying sane inside. I feel like I can understand better how the staff in prison might be feeling, or other inmates. I come out of my self-absorbed bubble and want to share some of that peace with others. Yoga helps me to meditate, and acts as a meditation of its own. I love the fact that I could do it anytime without disturbing anyone. It was an escape from prison - as if I wasn't inside at all. When I began practising properly I felt like people could see the change in me and were attracted and curious about how anyone could feel at peace inside. I was amazed at the types of people who were genuinely interested in trying it out. I think everybody can recognise inner peace, and everyone desires it. Especially in the cramped, frustrated, noisy environment of prison.

No better antidote

There were several suicides in the same prison as me while I was inside and the shockwave can be felt around the prison by both staff and inmates. It's one of the few times when the walls come down. Despite the fronts, everyone relates to that frustration. I could feel people searching for a way to be happy. I can't think of a better antidote to the pressures of prison than meditation and yoga. Without them, I might have been broken.

The pressure hasn't stopped just by leaving prison, and neither have the PPT, continuing to support me in my re-entry and spiritual pursuits. Previous opportunities have disappeared in terms of work, travel etc. Yoga and meditation continue to help me keep my priorities straight and to choose wholesome work, friends and activities. It's the spiritual nutrition that binds my life together with meaning. It keeps me focused on doing good things, and not falling back into old habits concerning drugs, especially. My spirituality is my new drug and so much more fulfilling. I am grateful for these gifts and insights. I feel blessed, content and much happier.



Yogathon, anyone?



By Lucy



Drawn at HMP Frankland

A Yogathon is 108 sun salutations, often done in a group or on a certain date when others will be doing it too. People do this to mark the changing of the seasons or the beginning of a new year, to challenge themselves or to promote or fundraise for a particular cause.

This year the Prison Phoenix Trust is doing a yogathon on the 29th of October and we are looking for people to join us. Some of us are doing it at the Yoga Show in London, some in smaller groups around the country and some alone, in their rooms or cells. Some are getting sponsorship to raise money for the Trust and some are doing it purely for the enjoyment and challenge.

We would love it if you could join us for the yogathon. We will be starting at noon on the 29th of October, and it would be wonderful if you could practise with us. If you would like to collect sponsorship, great!, but we are thrilled to simply share the yoga with you.

Sun salutations are traditionally done first thing in the morning. They are great for waking up the whole body and giving you a balanced workout – working on

flexibility, strength and cardio. If you do them consciously, flowing with the breath, they will work wonders to calm and centre you, preparing you for the day ahead.

Do the moves below starting from standing (far left on the diagram) and going around the circle illustration clockwise. Our free yoga books show in more detail how to do this. Write to us if you don't have one yet.

108 is a lot of sun salutations, so below is a training plan you might like to

follow to build up gradually, starting with just a few a

day. If you follow the plan you should be fine to do 108 on the 29th, but take it slowly, watch your breathing and take a rest whenever you need to. It's not a race. Just stay in time with your breath.

If you decide to do it, let us know how it went!



© Illustrations Kirby Paul

Suggested Training Schedule

| Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 19 September | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |
| am - 3 rounds pm - 6 rounds | am - 3 rounds pm - 6 rounds | am - 3 rounds pm - 6 rounds | am - 3 rounds pm - 6 rounds | am - 3 rounds pm - 6 rounds | rest | 12 rounds |
| 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 1 October | 2 |
| 12 rounds | 6 rounds | 12 rounds | 6 rounds | 12 rounds | rest | 18 rounds |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 9 rounds | 15 rounds | 9 rounds | 15 rounds | 9 rounds | rest | 27 rounds |
| 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 12 rounds | 12 rounds | 12 rounds | 12 rounds | 12 rounds | rest | 36 rounds |
| 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 15 rounds | 15 rounds | 15 rounds | 15 rounds | 15 rounds | rest | 45 rounds |
| 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | |
| 18 rounds | 18 rounds | 18 rounds | 18 rounds | rest | Yogathon! | |

Sailing on



Luisa has edited the newsletter and helped set up prison yoga classes in the UK and Ireland,

but is leaving the PPT to teach yoga full-time. She plans to keep writing to her friends behind bars and may even teach in prison each week. She says: "It's been a joy to work for the Trust and meet so many of you in prison. I've never met more gracious, attentive and inspiring students." We will miss her but know her career will thrive.

Great music for the PPT

For friends not in prison who would rather listen to two accomplished musicians than do sun salutations, put Sunday 11th November in your diary. At 3 pm at Colet House in West London, Jenna Monroe (vocals) and James D'Angelo (piano) will be performing 'The Spirit of Compassion' in aid of the Prison Phoenix Trust. James and

Jenna will perform songs from the great musicals, Leonard Cohen, the freedom songs of African-Americans, humorous songs, film themes and jazz standards. The afternoon is underwritten by The Study Society. Suggested donation of £5. For details, contact the Prison Phoenix Trust.



Take pause

Resetting the breath for deeper wisdom



By Luisa

However long you have been practising yoga, and however much of a 'glass half full' person you may be, there may come a time when inspiration is a little less free-flowing. Worse than that is how sometimes we react to things blindly – feeling out of control with our emotions. As you practise yoga more, you begin to see more obviously how intimately connected your breath and emotions are.

If you practise this exercise regularly you may find that not only are you more able to take pause before you react to things, but also you will feel more balanced in your energy levels – neither too tired or too wired.

1. Take a pillow, a blanket or jumper and a soft cloth. Sit on the floor and place the cushion lengthwise so that it just touches the buttocks. Gently rest your back on the pillow, tuck a blanket under your head and cover your eyes with a soft cloth.

2. Lie down quietly for some time. Close your eyes, with your eyes and ears feeling soft. Exhale quietly until your lungs feel empty and your belly is still soft.



“Empty lungs, soft belly...”

3. If you know ‘ocean breath’ from our summer newsletter, then begin breath in this way, extending the breath by lightly drawing in the walls of the throat. If not, then normal calm breathing will work fine!

4. Once you feel calm and settled, start to interrupt your in-breaths. Start inhaling into the belly for the count of four. Pause for a count of two. Continue to breathe in to the midchest for a count of four. Pause for a count of two. Finish the inhale into the top chest for a count of four. Pause for a count of two and then release the breath in one long, smooth, quiet exhalation.



Repeat the cycle again after a few normal breaths. You can repeat the breath for up to 10 minutes or as long as you feel comfortable. Then rest.

If you feel comfortable with this, you could go on to the next stage, which is a more calming variation.

1. Lie down quietly and breathe as above. Again you can practise this with ocean breath if you are familiar with it. Otherwise, just breath normally and smoothly. After a few minutes exhale completely.

2. Inhale steadily without any pause until your lungs feel full, but do not strain.

3. Start breathing out from the belly for a count of four. Pause for a count of two. Continue the breath out from the midchest for a count of four. Pause for a count of two. Finish exhaling from the top chest for a count of four. Pause for a count of two. Inhale with a steady, unbroken, full breath.

This is one cycle. Repeat the cycle, alternating with two to three normal breaths in between, for 10 minutes or so. Then return to natural breathing before rolling to your right hand side and slowly coming up to sitting.

Now see how easily you slip into meditation!



“And see how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grows in silence. God is the friend of silence.” ~ Mother Teresa

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. We are especially grateful to those who set up standing orders, which help us to plan our yearly activities more easily.

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