



**Newsletter, Summer 2011**

# DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN

Nick on page 2-3 says he feels kindly to people when he is meditating, but as soon as his door opens, his ego, pride, judgements and anger cloud things over and he slips back. This problem has faced hermits and meditators through the ages, whether they are spending ten years in a cave in the Himalayas or 45 minutes each morning and evening in their cell: how do you come down from the mountain – the tranquillity that can come from meditation – and deal with everyday stuff like cancelled visits and knockbacks?



**Moon rise - a student in HMP  
Bullington sails into a half-moon pose**

walking down the same street with the same hole. She pretends she doesn't see it, falls in it again, but gets out a little quicker. Later still, she's walking down the same street, acknowledges the hole, but still falls in. Some time after that she's walking down the same street, sees the hole, and walks around it. Finally, she walks down a different street altogether.

You may be fortunate enough to fall in only once, or it may take a little longer. However long it takes, it is helpful to know that no matter how powerful a habit is, it is definitely possible to reduce its influence. Nick knows this, as does Colin, who says on page 2 that his attitude and behaviour have improved since doing meditation and yoga regularly.

First of all, we don't have to beat ourselves up about slipping back into anger and judgement: habits of mind are often deep-rooted. There's that old story of the woman who walks down the street, falls down a deep hole, is lost and takes a long time to get out. She does get out and one day finds herself

There are all kinds of other things we can do that help us bring our wisdom down to everyday living. For example, having someone to talk with about how things are going, whether this is a Listener, or a friend. Or doing something for other people, which so many of you already do. This sharing with and giving to other people has a massive impact on our capacity to not be thrown by life: somehow it rounds off our sharp edges.

If there is some habit you want to drop that keeps cropping up in your day, you might consider finding something better, that also makes you *feel* better, to replace it. The taste of freedom that comes from seeing deeply into things that once 'owned' us is a powerful replacement. Not being controlled by that habit, and perhaps more importantly, seeing clearly the inability of it to satisfy, will weaken the habit.

Seeing deeply into things until you naturally become disenchanted with them. Easy to say, hard to do! But whether you are interested in starting a daily practice, or have been doing yoga and meditation for some time, keep what you do really simple: when you are sitting, keep focusing on the breath. Keep letting go of ideas about how things are, whether it's ideas about you, your situation, the world or even ideas about spirituality. Keep coming back to your breath. The more you forget your self, the more you discover your self.

Allow things and people around you to support you. At the same time, make the most of your capacity to see deeply into yourself. This is a pretty fantastic combination.



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

6 Certain flaws are necessary  
for the whole. It would seem  
strange if old friends lacked  
certain quirks. 9

- Goethe (1749-1832)



## **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.



#### From HMP Swaleside

**T**hank you for your book *Freeing the Spirit* and the CD *Relaxing the Body*.

I am fairly new to yoga, I would say only a couple of months into it, but already I feel the benefits, not just in my body, but in my mind and also in my life too. What an amazing difference I have noticed, also others around me in prison and most of all my family have noticed a wonderful change and a sense of calm.

I have never been satisfied with my own company or ever been comforted with myself before, but now that my life has turned around, the TV hardly ever goes on, I'm always full of life and energy, and most of all the bad days don't seem that bad anymore.

Thank you so much for your help. I've already got three other people doing yoga on my wing and I'm noticing the difference in them too. If only more people realised how they would benefit from yoga in prisons, the prison system would be a whole lot more relaxed and calm.

#### From HMP Send

**T**hank you for sending me a copy of *Freeing the Spirit through Meditation and Yoga*. I received it this evening when I came back from doing community work and was pleasantly surprised to have gotten the package so soon, and a day before my 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

Once everyone had gone to sleep and my landing was peaceful, I played the CD and listened to what was being said. I didn't follow the instructions, I just listened while sitting in my chair, but I did catch myself breathing deeply and holding it for a couple of minutes then breathing out through my nose. I will begin to follow the CD once I've listened to it completely, but I must say that just my listening to the clear, concise instructions has made me feel in a better place.

For the last two years I've had problems going to sleep but I refuse to take any kind of sleeping aid. I'll continue to update you on how I'm doing with the meditation and yoga.

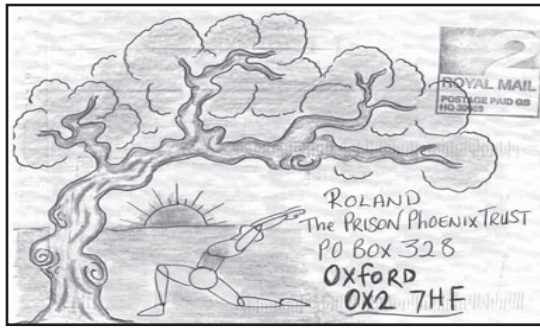


#### From HMP/YOI Forest Bank

**T**he books and the CD are helpful and I am now trying yoga and meditation in my cell and giving



#### From HMP Wakefield



meditation class. She and the other staff at Forest Bank prison have seen a vast improvement in my attitude, behaviour and my stress. I have been taken off medications and a self harm/suicide list because of this and am a lot calmer and more stress free. I am going to carry this on with my partner when I leave prison in a week. I have even persuaded my mum to go to classes when I get out. I never believed that it would help but it has. I am back on the tracks of life and now have a technique to reduce my anger and stress.

#### From HMP Nottingham

**I**'m still making good progress with the meditation and yoga. It has become a way of life to me. No two days are the same, and I'm finding the real me, letting go and shedding all the garbage I'd collected over the years. I find it sad I treated myself so badly for so long.

I'm starting to treat myself well and look after myself. I've not been this happy for as long as I can remember. Discovering what I have, I couldn't possibly turn back to my old life style and ways. I really don't think I could live that way anymore.

I don't need a lot in life to be happy. Just a bit of quiet is more precious than any amount of money or substance.



#### From HMP Frankland

**I**am re-establishing contact after quite a few years of madness. I have recently begun again to search for myself and to find true peace and spirituality. I started this process before but despite experiencing massive changes, I let it slip. I fell back into drugs and crime and came back to prison, despite my best intentions.

For the four months before I was released from my last sentence, I meditated and did pranayama, and I found such peace and happiness. I unfortunately didn't keep up my practices and it has taken five years of dilly dallying to find them again! I had been taking psychotropic medication for ADHD and paranoia, and while at first it was brilliant, I became immune to the effects and I realised that the only permanent solution was to search inside myself and not use crutches like drugs which only fixed me briefly. I knew how I wanted to be, and having experienced that sense of balance before, both with and without drugs, I determined to find inner peace, strength and love. So for four weeks now, no medz, and I have stuck to a strict routine of diet, exercise, meditation, yoga and pranayama.

I am writing because I would like to have contact with someone who can help me to understand my spiritual path. I have so many questions, and while I know all the knowledge is within me, I feel I need help to unearth it. While I understand principles, I find it hard implementing them. I love everyone while I'm meditating, but as soon as my door opens I find my ego, pride, judgments and anger cloud things and I slip. Although these are becoming less,

# Prison Letters



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which I guess is an answer to my own question! I think I am just impatient and want things NOW.

## From HMP Gartree

Meditation is a big part of my life. I meditate regularly three times a day. As I am a lifer, it helps give me a peaceful mind. I've tried the yoga breathing style and it was suprisingly calming so sometimes when I'm stressed I do it to calm down.

I suffer with clinical depression so the breathing exercises and meditation help me with these problems also.



## From HMP Norwich

I have found the books you sent most inspiring. I have been doing the yoga work from *Becoming Free through Meditation and Yoga* and think I am doing very well. I am a lot more flexible than I would have thought, but I am finding it hard to meditate. I am in a cell with three other blokes and they are always doing stuff around me. I haven't been able to find any time when they are asleep or even get up before them. Can you give me any advice on how I can block out what's going on around me or is the whole point to block it out with concentration on my breathing? I really do hope this will help me to sort out problems I have had in the past and to understand myself so I can move on with my life and not make the same mistakes again.



## From HMP Garth

Thank you for your letter, the book and the exercises you enclosed.

I have tried meditation and spend 20 mins every morning at 6 o'clock doing breathing exercises. When I first started I would have paid anybody to shoot the crows outside my window, but since I've been practising for some weeks they just fade into the background and don't bother me anymore.

## From HMP Lowdham Grange

It's been a few months now since you sent me the book on meditation and yoga and for me its been great. Thank you. It's been a struggle because I never had much patience and I was always quick to anger but I'm learning so much now and I'm able to help others now I'm not fighting everything.



From HMP Frankland

From HMP Frankland



## Meditation Corner

# Inside time

By Jason 

How often have you been told not to waste time? It is one of those annoying accusations everyone has to put up with. It becomes especially tiresome when you live with others.

I spent much of last weekend fiddling with my motorbike's suspension. There is not much wrong with it but I like to make adjustments to improve the cornering. This could easily be seen as a waste of time, and possibly a selfish one: I'm hardly improving the lives of those around me. There seems to be an idea that helping others will never be a waste of time, which can also get a tad annoying.

Recently, my son bought a new video football game which keeps him occupied for hours everyday. He sits there glued to the machine for ages. I find myself getting annoyed about him wasting time with those silly virtual footballers. How can he spend so long wasting time? Why not go outside and kick a real ball around? And so it goes, on and on in my head.

Perhaps you have experienced something similar. We receive many letters where people complain about television, music, video games and smoking in prison. Are these a waste of time too? Or are they valid ways of doing time? "If you can't beat them, join them" is one solution. I tried this with my son and bought a second controller for his video machine, so I could join in. So far it has not been a great success, perhaps because I was never good at football to begin with. There is also a nagging feeling that my own time is being wasted.

But perhaps the true waste of time is all this thinking. I could spend hours pondering whether my time, or someone else's time, has been well spent. For now it's time to do the opposite: sit upright, perfectly still and do nothing. This is not always easy, but for some strange reason it is incredibly worthwhile – and definitely not a waste of time. When the mind starts to quieten it stops making judgements, and so the first thought to disappear is deciding what is worthwhile. Gradually in the stillness it becomes apparent that nothing is better than anything else. There is also no activity more worthy than others, and perhaps the best way we can help others is not to interfere with their interests. Neither do we have to join in either; it is just a case of recognising everyone enjoys doing different things.

Perhaps the real test of this meditation will be this evening when my son turns the games machine on. Will I allow this to spoil my evening, or will I use this as a reason to spoil someone else's? Or perhaps it will just be another occurrence which comes and goes.





# Gentle yoga for pregnancy...

## or for when any of us needs to relax and ground

**F**eeeling tense and all over the place? There are some easy ways of relieving stress and tension from the body and mind for a calmer, healthier pregnancy. This sequence will also help if you're not pregnant!

Did you know that 'yoga' means 'union' or 'connection' in the ancient language of India? The practices of yoga can connect us with an inner intelligence which we all have, allowing us to feel happier, less stressed and healthier.

Many women who have practised yoga during pregnancy are full of praise for the breath to help manage pain and anxiety during labour, and the sense of being 'at home' in their bodies.

In the sequence below, you move in time with the breath, increasing freedom of movement in stiff or swollen joints and freeing energy throughout the body, boosting your vitality. It works best done as slowly as you can manage. When the body moves slowly, the mind does too so you soon feel calm and focused.

### Ankles and feet



First of all get into this starting position. Sitting on the floor, stretch your legs out in front of you with your feet slightly apart. Shift your weight forward a little and use your hands to move your buttock flesh up and back. Place your hands on the floor next to you or behind you to help your back stay tall.

1) As you inhale, push into your heels and draw your toes back towards your head. Exhale, point the toes away, stretching the fronts of the feet. Repeat 5-10 times.



2) Keeping the knees still, circle the feet slowly in one direction 5-10 times. Repeat changing direction.

### Cat stretch

This stretch, moving in time with the breath, makes your back flexible and comfortable. This posture is very good for lower back pain.



1) Come onto all fours. Use a pillow or sweatshirt under the wrists or knees if it's more

comfortable that way.

2) Breathe fully, in and out through the nose.

3) As you inhale, keep the back as flat as possible as you move the shoulders away from the ears, allowing the chest to expand and move forwards a little.

4) As you exhale, tuck the tailbone in and down, rounding the entire length of the spine, tucking the chin into the throat, and creating plenty of space between the shoulder blades.

5) Do 10-20 rounds moving slowly with your natural breath.

### Hip circles

These rhythmic movements remove tension around the lower back and pelvis and have a calming effect. They also create a soothing, rocking movement for the unborn child.

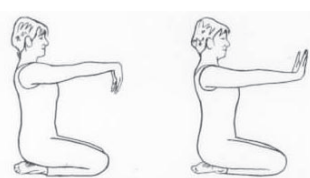
1) Stay on your hands and knees. Imagine that the central point of a circle on the floor between the two knees. Slowly begin to circle the hips clockwise around this point, letting the size of the circle get bigger or smaller as feels comfortable.

2) After 10-20 rounds, change direction and repeat.

### Wrists and shoulders

Come into thunderbolt pose, which is kneeling with a pillow or cushions under your bottom if you need them to be comfortable. This is a good posture to do after meals as it helps digestion.

1) Stretch your arms out in front of you, palms facing down. As you inhale point the fingers up to the sky as if you were saying stop. On the exhale slowly turn the hands down fully so that the finger tips face the floor. Repeat 5-10 times.

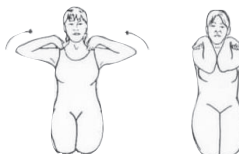


2) After resting the arms a moment, stretch the arms out again - this time palms facing up. Feel as if the backs of the hands are resting on a table.

As you inhale, move the thumbs towards the outer arms. As you exhale move your little fingers towards the inner arms. Repeat 5-10 times.

3) Now circle the wrists round fully in opposite directions, breathing slowly and deeply. After ten rounds, repeat changing direction.

4) Place your hands on your shoulders. Breathe in and send the elbows out wide fully, as you exhale close the elbows in front of you face. Repeat 5-10 times.



5) Bend the elbows, pointing your fingers up as you inhale. Exhaling, rotate at your shoulders pointing the fingers down. Repeat 5-10 times.



### Side bend and twist

Sit with your legs crossed simply with a support under your bottom. Make sure your legs are crossing at the shins and you are sitting on something high enough so your lower back is comfortable.

1) Inhale and sit up tall. As you exhale, keep both buttocks on the ground and place one hand out to the side and lean into it. You should feel a stretch down the opposite side of the body. Inhale and come back to the centre. As you





exhale repeat on the other side. Repeat ten times on each side.

2) Inhale and sit up tall. Exhale and twist round deeply one way, placing your hand behind you in a way that encourages your back to stay tall. Put the other hand over the knee to help deepen the twist and look over the shoulder. Inhale and return to the centre and repeat on the other side. Repeat ten times on each side.



### Grounding yourself

With hands resting on the knees, palms up, lightly touch the tip of the ring finger to the tip of the thumb. The other fingers are relaxed. This hand position can help you feel supported and stable. It helps when you feel disconnected from your body, or need to feel steadier.

### Breathing for two

Breathing well is vital to wellbeing in general. If you want to focus more, manage anger or simply sleep better, nothing beats yoga breathing. And when you are pregnant, you are breathing not just for yourself, but for your baby as well.

- 1) From simple crossed legs or thunderbolt, yawn a few times before you start and close your eyes.
- 2) Let breath come and go through the nose. Notice breath coming in and moving out. Just observe this coming and going.
- 3) Bring attention to the lowest part of your belly, below your belly button. Inhale and allow your belly to expand, exhale and feel your belly sink back down towards your spine. If you are very far along in your pregnancy, you won't feel much movement, but bring your attention here anyway, focussing on making more room for your baby on the inhale.
- 4) Now bring your attention to your ribcage. As you breath in allow the ribs to expand in all directions as breath moves in and up. This is like an umbrella opening slightly. Feel each rib move away from its neighbour. As you breathe out let the whole rib

cage deflate.

5) Next bring your attention right up to your collar bones and feel the breath expanding this area as you breathe in. Feel it softening as you breathe out. As your baby develops and takes up more space in your body, you will find breathing right up to the top of the lungs like this a helpful way of getting a full breath.



**Rest quietly and deeply with your blue sky mind.**

### Take rest

Finish this sequence by lying down comfortably. If you are not pregnant, or in very early stages lie on your back. If you are more than twelve weeks pregnant, lie on your left side. This keeps the weight of the baby from pressing on your arteries, guts and spine. Stay here for ten minutes at least, or up to 30 if you have time, paying attention to your breath and allowing the thoughts to drift through the mind without paying attention to them. Imagine that your mind is like a bright blue sky, and the thoughts and feelings are like clouds passing through. Keep your attention on your natural breath. Anytime you notice yourself thinking, just calmly bring awareness back to your simple, natural breath without any sense of judgement, being very kind to yourself. Rest quietly and deeply with your blue sky mind.

## Goodbye Mary

Mary Young, a great friend and volunteer of the Prison Phoenix Trust, died this May aged 92. Mary started at the Trust in 1994, when she had a chance meeting with Sister Elaine MacInnes, the Trust's Director at the time. Sister Elaine was used to driving in her home country of Canada, but to get her UK license she needed help driving on the left. Mary obliged.



After this Mary continued to help the Trust, often holding the fort at the office when the staff were all away. Mary was also active with the Scouts, Guides and The Oxfordshire Animal Sanctuary. In 2000 she became a councillor for the first time at the age of 81, in South East Kidlington ward (north of Oxford city). She was also Chairman of the Gosford and Water Eaton Council.

Being married to a ship's master, Mary travelled extensively, especially in West Africa. She is survived by her four children: Gail, Gary, Margaret and Michael, seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren. Latterly, Mary would climb the 26 steps to our office to frank the quarterly newsletter (over 10,500!). More recently, the stairs meant she arrived slightly out of breath, but full of stories and with her quick wit undiminished.

## A royal wave to our volunteers!

Because of Mary's contribution (see article on the left), and others like her who give their time and energy freely, the Prison Phoenix Trust has received The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, 2011. This is tremendous kudos for our volunteers, who keep the PPT working so well by writing letters to prisoners, filing, keeping our database up to date, dispatching the newsletter, and being trustees. Four volunteers will represent the Trust at a tea party at Buckingham Palace this summer!



# From trafficker to teacher

By Nick



**T**wenty years ago I was sentenced to three years for smuggling 100 kilos of cannabis through the Dover docks. I went into prison

a young boy and came out a full-blown criminal. Seven days after release I was standing on the side of a French motorway loading up four hundred kilos of cannabis bound for the streets of London. For the next ten years I devoted my life to smuggling.

At the end of the 90s I went on the run for VAT fraud and ended up in Buenos Aires, where I began trafficking cocaine from Columbia into Europe.

In Argentina I passed myself off as an entrepreneur, hiding behind various businesses laundering money through my property company, nightclubs, boats and cars, all built on drug money. But my days were numbered.

## Under arrest

After a two-year operation mounted by drug agencies from around the world, my enterprise came to a violent end when I was arrested outside my Buenos Aires nightclub in 2004.

Ten of us were arrested by the Argentine drug squad. I was beaten, interrogated and slung into a black hole for three days, after which I went before a federal judge and charged with drug trafficking, organised crime and money laundering.

I was sent to one of the most violent prisons in South America, an Argentinian maximum-security prison, where gangs would slit your throat for your phone card. Having some Columbian contacts I was received into a gang who I would eat, sleep and fight with for the foreseeable future. I was stripped of everything I owned materially. What couldn't be taken from me legally was stolen. The judges took what couldn't be stolen. The Argentinian prosecutors took the rest in freedom deals, never honoured.

After three and a half years one of my co-defendants and I were sentenced to 20 years and the other eight were acquitted. Though I was accustomed to violence on the outside, the deceit, betrayal and

mindlessness of the violence in the prison left me shocked. I eventually managed to get a prison apartment, a room the size of a small cell with kitchenette and small bathroom. This became my ashram, the best I could have asked for.

## Finding yoga

My trigger into spirituality was a book on yoga which made its way into my possession. Before this I thought only weirdos did yoga. But something gripped me and I began to study the practice, theory and philosophy of yoga. I learnt about asanas (the postures), pranayama (the breathing practices) and the biggest blessing of all, meditation, the contact with your inner self.

Yoga became an integrated part of my life and I embarked on a daily spiritual practice, with amazing benefits. Through asanas my physical body changed. Through pranayama I learned to control my body and mind through the breath. And through hours of meditation I learned who I was, and who I wasn't. I learned about the ego, the mind and I learned to love, respect and be proud of myself again. My thought process changed, along with my diet and mental make up.

I suffered much regret and remorse, mainly because of the pain I had caused my family, especially as I was not able to see them for the duration of my sentence. But regret also came from witnessing first hand the effects of class A drugs on vulnerable users who became addicts.

Yoga's emphasis on the union of the body, mind and spirit helped me become aware of myself in a way I had never been able to before. In the years in prison with nothing more than my thoughts I had grown to hate myself. Now, I stood back and had a different perspective on my life. I was reaping what I had sowed: cause and effect. My life in prison and as a smuggler was so dark and far removed from normality that I craved the pureness, simplicity and light that yoga offered. I read many books that helped me to forgive myself.

For the first time I felt free from my demons and my addiction to smuggling. Yoga became my AA. My demons were my own personal complexes about my worthiness as a person, my obsession about materialism and tying my identity, wealth and power to money. The process of becoming free from my addiction

to smuggling was a gradual one and it happened through the changing of my thought patterns through meditation.

Through the stilling of the mind in meditation I was able to find my inner self and gain strength. There were no particular turning points in my transition, which was gradual. There were many moments of true happiness and peace that I had never experienced as a smuggler.

## A new life

It took five and a half years to receive my fixed sentence after I lost my appeal. Then the Argentinian and British authorities decided it would be in my best interests to expel me from Argentina. I had no idea how long this would take; all I knew was that after 20 years I was going home to a life of normality.

I was told three days before my expulsion date that I would be going. My feet didn't touch Argentinian soil. I went from the mad-house of the prison to sitting on a jumbo jet: quite a trip! When I arrived in London the only things I owned were the rags on my back, my experience of the last 20 years and my knowledge of yoga.

Yoga has become a massive part of my life. My dream to help others integrate yoga into their lives is becoming a reality through the yoga studio I set up in Notting Hill, West London.



Cartoon from HMP Wakefield



## What happens when you slow down?

By Ross, HMP Erlestoke

*Ross has been practising yoga for many years and is planning to start a correspondence course to become a yoga teacher. He wants to teach at his prison and be able to earn a living at something he loves once he is released. Below, he tells us something about his life and how yoga helps him slow down and appreciate what is right here.*

**I** grew up in a bubble of civilised loving comfort and when that began to evaporate, the awakening was not easy. A quiet sadness turned sunshine into twilight as I watched people behave like barbarians and just not doing the right thing. My grandparents had taught me to do the right thing. They led by example. My parents were similar, but didn't always practise what they preached. As a teenager, I was pretty shocked to see people spitting, swearing, doing drugs, but I joined in because there was no alternative. It's funny because in one sense I hate lack of order and discipline.

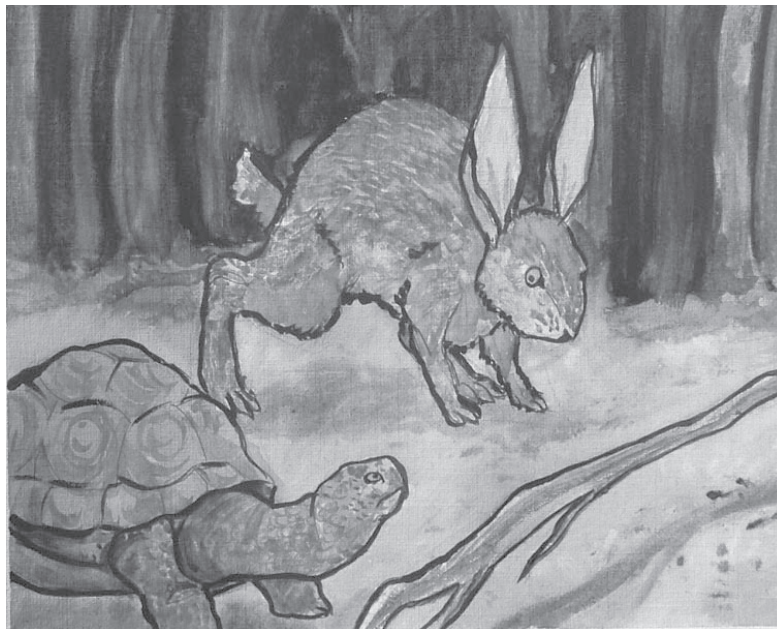
Then mum left home and I thought, it's all gone wrong, and if you can't beat 'em, join 'em, and then become one of the best of 'em. This inevitably required some fairly bold risk-taking: racing motorcycles, drinking a lot. But I was also taught to work well and earn money, just not how to manage it. At 21, I started moving around, and lived in different countries. I married but left that wonderful person to get back to my risky life. Meanwhile, my father, who I had so admired, had changed. Alcohol had set in some years before and he was now a bitter alcoholic. I hated him for becoming someone who I did not admire, and hated myself for the same.

As time went by I couldn't see a reason to accept the bits I knew were flawed in life and people: the hypocrisy, the pretending. The only genuine people I had known were my wife and my grandparents. My grandparents died and I had rejected my wife. I truly feared her goodness and truthfulness. The only option was oblivion through drugs and alcohol. In the end I was so fed up with it all, the choice was either suicide or salvation. I didn't know how to find salvation, so I had to stop the world turning and wound up with a charge of robbery with an IPP tariff.

But it has worked out well. My crime shocked the old man

off his booze and into some more sensible living, though our relationship is finished. My shattered dreams have been restored to me through human compassion, education, yoga and Buddhism. My mother and I have discovered a good relationship. She's been amazing and been my best friend since I came to prison. The pinnacle was getting a platinum award for a short story about my grandfather as a child in Maryport in Cumbria: a combination of my dearest most missed person and my dream of becoming a writer. See what a person can do when they slow down?

The communion (see quote below) I feel with yoga and



**Slow and steady wins the race! Illustration by Arthur Rackham**

meditation is present in everything after I finish my practice. My attention will fall on a crumb on a person's cheek, or the sound of one of many beats of a passing crow's wings, or the contemplation of everything simultaneously. Yoga removes the need to question, to speak, to suppose, to assume, to suggest, to know, to feel. And loosens one's attention to the desire or rather need to be... anything.

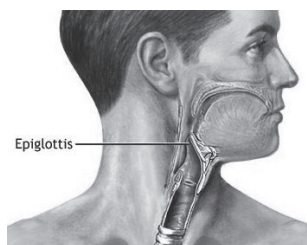
I was experimenting with yoga and rowing and found if I don't count breaths as I often used to do, or treat it all like a test of endurance, and instead,

just feel the body instead of thinking numbers, the feeling of communion that comes afterwards becomes present during the exercise. Likewise with rowing, I started putting a towel over the display panel so I couldn't see the data and it totally changed the experience. There was no point at which I felt any different to the moment before. Fatigue did not come and go. I did not need to rest or drink. My energy was constant instead of ebb and flow. In short, it was easier. Counting in yoga or watching the speedo on the rower sets conditions and beliefs, illusions, fears, doubts, assumptions, presumptions, limits, thoughts, jabbering like a mosquito round the head.

*Ross told us that this quote sums up what he means when he talks about communion. It is from a blind naval officer in the Pacific Islands, writing in 1787:*



**On the summit of the precipice and in deep green woods, emotions as palpable and as true, have agitated me as if I were surveying them with the blessing of sight. There was an intelligence in the winds and the hills and in the solemn stillness of the buried foliage that could not be misleading. It entered into my heart and I could have wept, not because I could not see, but because I could not portray all that I felt.**



# Ocean breath



By Luisa



sound of the water hitting the beach, pebbly or sandy, Brighton or Lanzarote as you prefer. And hear the sound of the water retreating. Now open your eyes. Feel calmer, more centred, more focused? Did you know that you can get even more of these benefits by creating the sound of the ocean with just your breath?

In yoga, we use this breath practice called ocean breath, or 'ujjayi' in the ancient language Sanskrit, literally meaning 'victorious', to help us become victors of our minds. Deeply relaxing, both the sound and length of this breath helps to call your parasympathetic nervous system into play, the system which helps to calm the body and the mind. Here's how you do it:

1. Sit in a comfortable upright position on the floor, on a chair if you wish.
2. Breathe deeply in through the nose.
3. Breathe out through the mouth, keeping the face very relaxed and making a soft whispering sound, as if you were misting up a mirror or window to write in it.
4. Repeat steps 2-3 a few times until you really begin to hear the sound of the ocean on that long smooth breath out through the mouth. This breath out through the mouth also helps to relax the jaw and face, where we often hold tension.
5. Now close the mouth and continue to breathe in and out through the nose, but keep that ocean sound in your breath. Continue applying the same toning to the throat, or epiglottis, (see diagram above) that you did when the mouth was open. It's a little easier to make the sound on the exhale, but see if you can make the same sound on the inhale too.
6. Keeping the mouth closed, and the face relaxed, continue to breathe in this way, focusing on an even sound as you

breathe in, an even sound as you breathe out. The breath should feel totally comfortable. Don't force it – the key to this breath is relaxation. It's a bit like the breath you make just before you fall asleep. Some small effort is required to produce a pleasing sound, but too much effort creates a grasping quality and a grating sound.

7. Let the sound of the ocean calm your mind and help you become victorious over your thoughts.



Once you are comfortable with this breath, it can be used when doing your yoga postures as a way of helping you stay present, self-aware and grounded. It needn't be loud, just loud enough to keep you focused. If you are straining in your breath, you may be pushing yourself too hard in your practice. Use that feedback as a guide throughout your yoga session—if you start to strain, it may be time to back out of a pose and rest.

I also like to use this breath when I get annoyed or stressed during the day, though you have to make it quietly so people don't stare!



“Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything, That's how the light gets in.” - Leonard Cohen, Singer/Songwriter

Drawn by Emma Bates, HMP Newhall

*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.*

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

