PRISON PHOENIX TRUST P.O. BOX 328, OXFORD, OX2 7HF

www.theppt.org.uk



a "Good night Dan," or "Good night Paul" to each person. Some

Newsletter, Spring 2012

Swinging Doors

t may seem like we have no control over our lives sometimes. Someone else is always telling us what to do.

We can't do what we want to when we want to. And so our lives can easily seem out of our control, not really ours, and not worth putting much energy into.

Two of my favourite stories talk about getting a sense of control back, and with it, some sense of order in the chaos, some brightness cracking through the gloom. The first one comes from a man who had been in a big London prison for several months. His cell door would be shut by an officer at 4.30 and not opened again until 9.00 the next morning. He said he felt a painful lack of control in his life, especially each time his door slammed shut in the afternoon. He was dispirited and becoming depressed.

Against the Grain

During this time, he began a meditation practice, sitting on his bed each morning and evening for half

an hour. Things got a little easier for him, but the daily door slamming continued to bring him down. At one point, he said it dawned on him to shut the door himself a few minutes before it would be shut by the officer. This was the start of seeing his situation differently, and bringing an element of control back into his life.

The other story is also about cell doors, and involves an officer, who cut against the grain when she was banging up in the

evening. Rather than simply slamming the doors shut, with little by way of greeting to the occupants, she said she would close each door quietly, with

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.



Stretching the sides during a taster workshop at HMP Huntercombe

the breath. It really doesn't matter what you call that thing that kicks into life when we really let go of ourselves and simply trust. From your letters, it is clear that it is working.

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

The outward man is the swinging door. The inward man is the still hinge. ** ~ Meister Eckhart, philosopher and mystic



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of the other officers teased her about this, but she knew that this was the right thing for her to do and had the strength to do it and to take a bit of ribbing.

A Fresh Way of Seeing

We do all sorts of things throughout our day and week often without even thinking about them. Maybe we have just always done them. Or maybe we do them because that seems to be what everybody else does. But it's surprising how taking yourself off "auto pilot" and taking some control of what is happening, even in seemingly small ways -- like the way you close a door or the way you greet someone -- can have a big impact on you and the people around you.

So many of you tell us that these fresh ways of seeing things or doing things come to you without you even trying to re-gain control because you are practising meditation and yoga each day, trusting in the simplicity of

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



From HMP Wayland

T Thile detoxing and afterwards I found yoga works better than any

medication the doctor could give us. I feel like yoga in jails, specifically on detox wings is so missed, so misunderstood, I'm trying to talk to people in here who might be able to start a yoga class.

I was patiently awaiting my books before they arrived today from the ever slow reception. This is probably the first time in my life I've shown patience. Just knowing my shortcomings is eye opening, dealing with them challenging, overcoming them utterly amazing. I have passed on Bo's book, We're All Doing *Time*, to a couple of people. I tell people who ask, to try meditation and see where it gets them, but pretty much keep myself to myself. If I'm open and honest, I think anyone who is the same will be drawn to me.

I am used to being in a really negative frame of mind: lying, stealing and being deceitful. Now I'm always either positive or neutral, but mostly positive. Not a lot can get me down anymore and hopefully after a while, nothing will.

I heard an officer ridiculing someone, maybe me, saying "After detoxing, they all turn to religion when they can't get stoned". Attitudes like that will never help anyone. But I'm finding it easier to tolerate people who would normally make me angry.

Being Christmas, normally it's drinks, drugs and being miserably smashed. Not this year, my first clean Christmas and New Year for 20 years at least. I'm happy about it. I'm in the right place to get my drug problem addressed and get my head and heart right, to find out who I am again, who I can be.

From HMP Pentonville

eing able to practice **D**yoga in prison has been a Godsend. When I took part in the Tuesday morning class, which I am looking forward to

tomorrow morning, I remind myself that there is nothing that I would rather be doing. For that period of time I am truly free.

I am on remand for a fairly serious

charge and have never been in prison before. Adjusting to this environment has been challenging, especially with insomnia and anxiety, and joint pains due to not moving about enough.

I would like to give something back when I am released, but for now I'm going to focus on the here-and-now!



HMP Hatfield

n 2004 I was sentenced to 18 years. I was addicted to heroin, crack cocaine and Aevery other drug available; gambling was another addiction; all of these lasted through forty years of life - high, low and in between.

A letter from my daughter was the push I needed to turn my life around. Since then, five years ago, I've stopped being so selfish. I practise yoga every day and meditate. I've been doing this for about three years. I also gave up smoking after 47 years, no mean feat for me!

Yoga is food for mind, body and soul. The Quaker chaplain I met also opened up a whole new world for me! I found silence turned everything around.

I'm going to college, studying art with the hope of going on to take a degree in Fine Art next year.

From **Dochas Centre**

The yoga is going great, really great. Thank you so much for the books. I am in a nice house where 14 of us live. The house is divided into two apartments in which three people share and then four other bedrooms where two people share. Every evening at 7.30pm the outside door is locked but the people inside are free to move about. That's when we do our own exercises e.g. pilates and the like and at 9.00pm we do your yoga.

Sometimes we could be seven in number and others maybe just three. It matters not, the ball starts rolling at 7.30pm!



From **HMP** Parc

✓oga really settles me **L** and I find myself

being even nicer to people than I already was. I'm out in three months. For ages I was dreading the old starting all over again thing. Like contacting my son and

Prisoners'

sorting a place to live. Now I'm always thinking positive thoughts and picture myself in happy situations. It's cool.

Is peace in meditation essential? Sometimes the wing gets loud at night time when I'm meditating. I try to cut it out but most of the time I just give up and end up waiting for peace and quiet. This can be annoying too.

Any tips on how to blank this out? Or should I just leave it and try again the following night? - which is probably going to be noisy again.

Ed. This question of noise on the wing is a great one. So many people struggle with noise in prison. Our winter 2011 newsletter may help – we'll send you a copy if you can't find one in Parc. We'd love to know how you, and others, cope with noise.

From HMP Lowdham Grange

wo years ago, I started I practising yoga. I have learned so much about myself and I'm learning every day. When

I first started I didn't know what to feel or what I was going to gain from attending, but I went with an open mind and heart so I was ready to experience something new.

My teacher, Amarajyoti, has a famous saying: "Don't believe anything I say". I used to wonder why she always said that but then I realised that everyone's yoga experience is different and she wants us to have our own experiences.

I learned that yoga means unity or oneness. It does not mean bending and stretching your body. Unity and oneness begins with one's self.

I used to get angry easily. I even used to shout at my family over the phone, but now I have more control over my temper and sleep better at night. Yoga has helped to improve my life in a positive way.

From HMP Shrewsbury ∕our CD and book,



helped me tremendously by bringing my life into focus. Due to this I was able to reduce my medication both for my anxiety and my depression. I am now looking forward with much more positivity. My family and friends have noticed the improvement in my wellbeing.

I was moved to another prison two weeks

Letters

ago and was only given 20 minutes notice of the move. This meant I was unable to pack all of my property, and I had to leave the book and CD behind. I have recently had a letter from my old padmate who says he is finding them helpful so I told him he could keep them.



From HMP Jurby

couple of weeks back I learned that

my 16-year-old daughter was dabbling in drugs and this worried me sick, so much so that I could not sleep. I was unable to contact her for 13 days, and didn't sleep a wink at night for nine days. At the end I was physically and emotionally drained. I've never experienced such a degree of anxiety and frustration in my life over anything. I was, however, able to function due to the 30 minutes meditation in the morning and 30 minutes in the evening I do each day. This was enough to recharge my batteries and keep me going to work and doing what I had to in order to get by. Without this hour's respite each day, I don't know what I would have done. It literally stopped me from cracking 'cos I was the most helpless, frustrated and completely devastated I have been since my incarceration began. I'm certain I would have lost it and had some sort of breakdown without

the meditation.

From HMP Edinburgh



I had to change my ways when I got chronic anxiety and had panic attacks. I used to run about full of energy and talking with everyone on the hall as I get on with everyone. I stopped this when the attacks started. They would last three hours and I would hyperventilate the whole time. It's a scary and horrible illness to have. I'm now 38 years old; I stay in my cell all day – no job or exercise due to my illness. A lot of guys probably say I'm anti-social because I'm in my cell all the time but I'm not interested in what they think. If they suffered what I go through they would know why I'm like this. I've had it for 10 years. I am more relaxed and about to start going to the gym to do fitness training and it's due to the book *Becoming Free* and CD you gave me. If there are others who suffer with anxiety, give yoga a try.

From Training Unit, Dublin

Of all places to be, prisoncanbechaotic and full of distractions. It's strange, isn't it? So by meditating, or even



learning to be still and sit in silence and not feel uncomfortable I find inner peace, which has been so beneficial.

Most days I don't even watch television, except to watch football, but at most an hour or two in the evening. Before, if I spent more than five minutes alone the TV would be straight on, for comfort I think, but now that I spend time without it, I enjoy my own peace and space. That reflects outwards to others too.

Meditation Corner

Breaking Point



evenly through the nose and focus on the out-breath. You many find after a few breaths that something comes up which disturbs you – it could be a thought, or perhaps a sound, or a feeling in the body. Forget about this and concentrate again on the breath.

You may feel that you are not making progress and keep thinking about things. But progress is just a thought and can be forgotten about – just keep going back to the breath and noticing each silent exhalation.

After five or ten minutes, stop and slowly focus upon the things in your cell. There may be chips in the wall, scratched paintwork, worn shelves, food stacked on the windowsill. Perhaps you find these are not so important now – the food will be eaten, the shelves still hold belongings and save table space. Scratched paintwork is unavoidable and you will never find a wall without some sort of damage. Immediately you can see there is less to repair, and you can choose which should have your attention. When the mind is still – even for just a minute – wear and tear can be seen as a vital part of each moment. And there is something immensely reassuring that our own knocks, dents, doubts and fears are also quite normal, and wholly acceptable when the mind becomes quiet.



cently the PPT office has been a Khive of activity. Apart from our normal work of supporting prisoners, we have been repairing things that have worn out. The printer jammed during our last newsletter dispatch and needed to be completely dismantled; a number of our computer monitors have failed and need electronics replacing; even the toilet stopped flushing and needed new parts. The carpet is stained and needs cleaning, the walls are chipped and marked, the washing up needs doing ... and all of this on top of our normal work. And a lightbulb has just gone! The list is endless, and it can seem that everything needs constant upkeep and attention.

I imagine this would be frustrating in prison, especially where you can't repair these things yourself, but have to wait for the maintenance men - who will be snowed under with things to mend.

Luckily there is a simple way of reducing all this work – and you can start right now in your cell. You will need somewhere to sit upright and not be disturbed for a few minutes. With the back straight and sitting perfectly still, start to focus your attention on your breathing. Breathe silently and

Research Project Lifts Off!



140prisoners in seven prisons are joining a research project that the PPT is running with the support of NOMS. Inmates at HMPs Dovegate, Featherstone, Hewell, Shrewsbury, Stafford and HMP-YOIs Drake Hall and Swinfen Hall are attending 10 weeks of yoga and meditation classes to see what difference it makes to their stress, anxiety and well-being, among other measures. We are pleased that scientists at Oxford University are in charge: it means the project is really sound and we hope to get some quantitative evidence to back up what you say about how yoga and meditation help you. What we'd really love is if this research helped get more yoga classes going in prisons. Watch this space!

Other News from the Nicks

We travelled a lot in the winter to those seven prisons to get the research going, but Jason and Elaine also managed to squeeze in a meditation and yoga workshop for staff and one for inmates at HMP Bristol, with local teacher Mary. At the time of going to press, it looked likely that classes will begin soon.

A taster workshop is also scheduled for a bail hostel in Reading, and we are finalising workshops and classes in HMPs Holloway and Winchester.

Why the Breath?

Those of you who attend yoga classes or who have a meditation practice will notice how often your teacher draws your attention to your breathing. What is it about the breath that has led to it taking such a central role in our practice? As you read this become aware of your own breathing, noticing the gentle rise and fall of your breath.

Breath is life, without it we would die. It is so much a part of us that we don't normally pay attention to it. Only when something interrupts our breathing do we realise just how much we depend upon it for our very life.

Our breath will change as our moods change. When you are angry notice how your breathing becomes short and fast as your body seeks to draw in as much oxygen as possible in readiness for the action to follow.

Checking Your Breath

As you go about your business today notice how your breath changes with your moods and emotions. What happens to it if somebody says something upsetting? How does it change when you are exercising in the gym? Notice your breath on waking up after a deep sleep or following your daily yoga or meditation practise.

Our emotional state affects our breathing and helps our bodies respond when we feel in danger. This is a powerful and ancient process. It evolved when we lived in caves to help us survive in a dangerous world. Our breath will become fast and shallow when we feel threatened and will be deeper and slower when we are at

rest.

The totally amazing thing is that this power works both ways; we can use it as a tool to change how we feel, to change the way we think and the actions that we take. By breathing in slowly, deeply, gently and naturally we can learn to manage our emotions and change our reactions to a situation.

A Bridge to our Inner Self

Let's go back to the questions posed at the beginning. Why is it that yoga and meditation teachers refer so often to the breath? It is because the breath has a power greater than we can imagine. Awareness of the breath is the first step in a journey to take back control of our lives rather than being blown around like leaves in the wind. The breath is a bridge to our strong inner self, that part of ourselves that we like. It is a link with our true nature. This is what we do when we meditate.

As you sit or stand right now, allow your shoulders to drop, lift your chest and lengthen your spine. Imagine there is a thread of light attached to the top of your head gently pulling you towards the sky. Relax you neck and slightly lower your chin. Now, be aware of your breathing, the gentle in flow and out flow of your breath. The coolness of the breath as it enters the nostrils. The warmer air as it leaves the body. Become aware of the gentle rise and fall of the chest as the breath enters and leaves the lungs. Let your attention settle comfortably in the breath. Be with the breath and know that this is the first step on a long and exciting journey.



How is the breath when you are at rest?

Peace and Love are the Highest Prize

From HMP Parc

Over the last six months or so I've built up a rapport with the King's Church Visiting Team. It would be able to attend their church upon release. This is not something I take lightly, as I appreciate that some people are a bit paranoid about ex-convicts coming into

their church. There are many questions that are rising up, such as where will I end up and who will be there, but ultimately I must trust that the Lord will provide answers. I feel a bit like a boy about to embark on a journey to a land where all the people are strange and yet I feel comforted that all will be well. I am after all in the strangest land on earth already, a land of giants and monsters, where all your fears are magnified. I thank God that, in these last 15 months, I have learnt the joys of meditation and prayer.

The constant renewal of salvation and nirvana is such an intriguing phrase. One that I've never heard put quite like that. From a Christian point of view it makes perfect sense. As it's written, "be transformed by the renewing of your minds" and there is the constant repetition throughout the New Testament for repentance. The word "repent" means to change your mind. It speaks of a radical, root and branch change, not some halfhearted New Year's resolution. People are not generally used to this kind of deep change.

Change Your Thinking

When John the Baptist stood up and shouted "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand", he was saying get ready by changing the way you think. This is surely a process of stripping away old habits and bad patterns of thought to get back to the purer nature "as a little child". In time and with practice it comes. The mind becomes clearer and more pure and able to see things as they really are.

Meditation definitely helps in this regard. I'm not sure it would work so well



Angel of the North, by Anthony Gormley, at Gateshead

without it. The daily practice of meditation allows for deeper penetration into the innermost mind. To set aside 45 minutes every day to meditate, plus another 30 minutes or so to write takes focus. But the combined effect of contemplation with meditation is powerful medicine. It can and does unravel the worst aspects of self delusion. It can instill a strong sense of humility which remains even under pressure.

To be fully enlightened whilst still alive in this body is to experience all the joys promised by Christ. Free from suffering. It's possible. I've caught glimpses of it during meditation. That deep sense of peace, that everything is alright, when time falls away and now is all that matters. That is a kind of renewal too.

My cell mate has noticed a change in me. It is impossible to hide your true character from your cell mate. I am glad this is happening. It is an indication of the work which is ongoing. Peace is a universal state, enjoyed by much of nature and all those who know how to quell the troubled mind. Peace and love are indeed the highest prize.

Springtime

First a howling blizzard woke us, Then the rain came down to soak us, And now before the eye can focus -Crocus.

~Lilja Rogers

Life on Release **Phone a Friend** Dave Hardwick sets up a helpline for seniors.

L ast year, Dave Harwick was trying to get what he was due from the benefits system. Increasingly frustrated by delays and bureaucracy, Dave got some publicity for his problem locally – he lives in Derbyshire – and as a result, lots of other seniors got in touch with him.

Dave says, "I was surprised by the number of people who contacted me and by the range of problems facing them. So I decided to do something to help the over ten and a half million over 65s in the UK." In October, Dave launched a national help and support telephone line for senior citizens. Friendship Line UK aims to decrease the feeling of being isolated and neglected that many over 65s experience.

Soon after, the Morning Show got in touch to see if Dave could make an appearance. Dave decided not to, concerned that their operation, still small, wouldn't be able to cope with an avalanche of thousands of calls. At the moment, there are six volunteers helping, receiving calls routed to their home numbers. They are registering as a non-profit charity and are happy to grow slowly.

A Friendly Voice

Dave says, "Any senior citizen contacting us will have access to help with such things as form filling and benefits problems, support at times of trauma or stress, and friendship. Many senior citizens live alone and there are times when they feel despondent. The Friendship Line is there to offer a friendly voice to such people. The service is totally free and confidential."

"Being disabled and fairly housebound and a senior citizen myself, I have suffered that lack of friendship and isolation myself



and believe me: it isn't good."

The project has helped Dave himself because he is able to serve other people, which is important to him. He says he's in much better health now. He isn't as fatigued and he isn't just sitting at home doing nothing. Since starting the project he has also become chairman of the local tenant's association, and travels to Bristol for meetings of the national housing association.

Apart from those trips, he is generally quite housebound. But his faith, which was key to his ability to start this project, is strong. His local church is an old building that can't be adapted to his level of disability, but the local vicar or the curate comes every three weeks to celebrate communion, which he loves.

He says he is completely dedicated to

his fellow humans. This isn't a new thing for Dave. He was a Listener when he was in prison, and soon after he was released from HMP Lincoln in 1995, he started an organisation in Skegness to help exprisoners find accommodation, with the support of a former JP, the Lincoln prison

chaplain, and even British Gas!

Dave understands the importance of the ordinary in our lives. He says, "We need to pay attention to the little things in life. They can be so valuable in maintaining our peace of mind and more importantly help in preserving our sense of reality. So often we can go off at a tangent and it's those little things that give a little push back to whatever road we are travelling at that particular time."

He is ever appreciative of what is right in front of him. "Each of the seasons has its own beauty: blue bells in Spring; the bright, almost brash colours of Summer, the multi coloured leaves of Autumn and finally the snow and frost. No matter how hard man tries to copy or whatever technology we employ, nothing can ever fully imitate Mother Nature."

Regular periods of silence are important to Dave. He says, "I get loads of comfort from meditation. Many of my friends find it hard to understand how I can spend hours sometimes at home without television, company or music just at peace with my inner self. It has such a positive and invigorating effect on me, such a source of comfort and peace."

The Friendship Line UK number is 01773 605 055

Can Human Beings Flourish in Prison?

The Prison Phoenix Trust is delighted to host a talk by Professor Alison Liebling on Tuesday 29th May at 6.30 p.m. at Colet House, Hammersmith. Alison will speak about her research which has shown that prisoners describe a feeling of personal development only in a few, high quality prisons. Questions she will explore include: What contributes to that feeling of personal development? Should prisons be aiming for a climate of personal development? How can they do that? And can yoga and meditation play a role in creating such a climate?

While many readers will not be at liberty to attend, most will have benefited from the impact of Alison's research: she developed the tool Measuring the Quality of Prison Life, now used routinely by the prison service to assess the quality of prison regimes. Admission is free but you need to book by writing to us

at the PPT, PO Box 238, Oxford, OX2 7HF or getting in touch through our website.



Alison is Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Director of the Prisons Research Centre at the University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology. She has carried out research on suicides in prison, staff-prisoner relationships, the work of prison officers, incentives and earned privileges, prison privatization, values and practices in prison life, and measuring the quality of prison life.

She has published several books, including *Prisons and their Moral Performance* and *The Effects of Imprisonment*. She has also recently taken up the practice of yoga.

My Life Makes Sense

From HMP Wormwood Scrubs

My mother and my wife have done yoga over the years and they both love it. I couldn't really grasp why. I felt I was too busy, living a different lifestyle. I've always known meditation would help me, and I tried most mornings before leaving for work, but I couldn't breathe right or just silence my mind. Now with Freeing the Spirit Through Meditation and Yoga with great illustrations and the CD calming and directing me I feel so much more settled.

I can't wait to hear the response from family. I have also recently given up



Waking Up Happy

From K.H. Hospital

E very day I meditate. I even sit in the day area with all the hustle and bustle, arguing and demanding going on, TV blaring, patients playing pool and table tennis, and I concentrate my mind into an awareness that's unusual in such chaos. How comfortable I feel though, and how aware I am of myself and those around me. It's bliss.

Every morning I wake up, smile, think about the day happily, then stare at nothing. This helps me wake up happy. If I remember, I do the sun salutations two or three times, fully stretch, then go about a morning routine.

I'm smoking much less now. Mentally I am more able than I have been in years.

smoking cigerettes after 20 years and yoga and meditation is helping with that too. It's all coming together now.

I'm enjoying my meditation and yoga and getting to grips with the poses. I'm starting to feel like a teenager again – I'm more flexible and agile and responsive, and I'm 37. I've finally made some serious lifestyle choices – I've given up smoking cigarettes two months now. I've gone vegetarian, no drugs or alcohol – I've detoxed myself from all medications, even anti-depressants.

Blown Away

Meditation and yoga, combined with the above, has enhanced everything about me – my senses, thoughts, feelings and emotions and even my reactions. I think more and explore my present and future. All of the ambitions I've ever had in life

This is due to being on the right medication and my commitment to meditation. I can empathise with others much quicker and easier now.

Anger Never Rules Me

Anger very seldom takes me over now. I can feel angry but anger never rules me to a feeling of aggression. I have love for my surroundings, for other people and myself, of which I've never felt before. I think I understand love more now than I ever have. Love to me is an adoration, appreciation and an urge to please that which I love in any way I truly can. Being true to myself helps me be true to others and I have

self-esteem like I have are at the forefront of my heart, mind and soul – I can't explain how strong my will and determination is. I am doing a British Industrial Cleaning Sciences course, a Health and Social Care distant learning course and I've started writing business plans for four businesses, two organisations and three loved hobbies – where has it come from? Within! These are things that were always there but never acted on. I am blown away!

I can be someone great, no matter what my past was like. This is a win-win situation for me and everyone I have or will come into contact with – family, friends, business clients and random people. My life makes sense now.

Yoga and meditation has given me the present, not the past or future, the here and now – the ambition, motivation, will and determination, and of course the desire to raise the limitation bar.

never felt before. It is wonderful.

Suffering goes on around us all the time and is something we are going to have to deal with at some point. There will always be some kind of negativity in our lives. After many years of denying and dismissing these feelings I now realise I have to embrace them, learn to enjoy suffering and understand negativity because I can't escape them. I am learning how to embrace, love and enjoy suffering, whilst recognising negativity and finding why I, others or both, see it as negativity.

Envelope by Colin, Rowanbank Clinic



⁶⁶No winter lasts forever; no spring skips its turn. ~ Hal Borland, author, 1900-1978





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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