



Newsletter, Summer 2012



FLOWER POWER

About twice a month, Prison Phoenix Trust staff hold free taster yoga and meditation workshops in prisons to try to start up weekly classes. (We've recently gone to HMP Kingston and Morton Hall Immigration Removal Centre.) Usually

the prison allows us to bring in a candle, which we light and place in the centre of the room. We also bring in a small vase of flowers to go beside it. Just something a little different!

Because we often go by bus and train, and the flowers can't be packed away in our rucksack, we carry the flowers in front of us through public spaces – often noisy, rushed, urban and crowded spaces where it is easy for people to overlook each other, like bus or railway stations. The flowers have an impact on people when they see them: most people stop or at least slow down, and smile. If people are standing or sitting near, riding on the tube for example, they smile and tend to start conversation.

What is it about the flowers that make people pause and connect? Perhaps it is the beauty and fragility that is so unexpected in harsh, impersonal places. But could it be that people smile because the flowers ask nothing of us? They carry no side. They are fully themselves, completely at home anywhere. What a relief to us who are always considering how to present ourselves, how people view us, or what kind of people we need to be. The flowers catch people short, and stop a lot of the posturing and self-imaging that we are so good at; people stop and smile because they recognise something of the poise, simplicity and lack of pretence which is there in them all of the time.



Perfect as they are - the yoga class at HMP Greenock

The same things happen when we reach the prison: gate staff and officers walking by cannot help but comment. This is a little less dramatic as prison staff tend to be friendly and talkative anyway – and perhaps used to unusual sights!

The quality that flowers have of being completely at home and at ease is in fact to be found everywhere, all the time. If you

practise meditation or yoga in your cell, or want to give it a try, you of course need some guidance – our free books and CD, the PPT letter writers, and the 151 weekly prison yoga classes we offer can help you with that. But it can also be a great help to prepare your cell for practice. Give it a sweep, a good clean and a tidy before you practise. If you smoke, empty the ash tray. And see if you can bring in something from the natural world to place

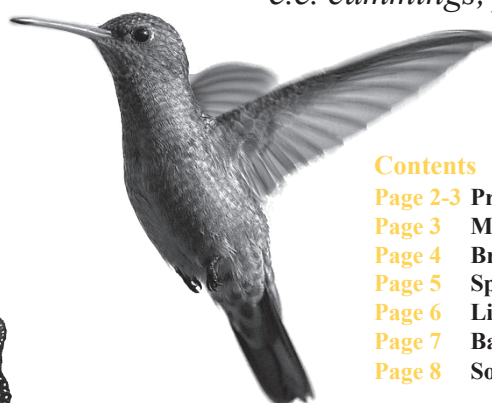
on an uncluttered surface. You may not be able to get a flower, but you may find a feather, or a nice stone or a leaf. All of these things — in fact, all things and all events — are speaking a simple and wordless truth to us all the time. They are exactly as they are, demanding nothing of us. The leaf or feather in your cell can help cut short the worrying, analysis and fretting that may besiege you. So many friends in prison have said that in this stopping, it becomes clear that right where we are is absolutely perfect.



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

“ The earth laughs in flowers. ”

~ e.e. cummings, poet, 1894-1962



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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.



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

Prisoners'

From HMP Featherstone

In 2011 I was given a five and a half year sentence. I found prison life very stressful as I found myself separated from my partner of 10 years and my two children of age one and three. I was under so much stress because I felt I had let my family down.

In March 2012 I was lucky to be selected for the yoga and meditation research run by Oxford University and the Prison Phoenix Trust concerning the effects of yoga and meditation in prison. At first I was sceptical that it could help me but after only two weeks I noticed I was less stressed and really enjoyed doing the poses, not just in class but whenever I could. Now, in my fifth week, my outlook has changed so much. I find my days stress free and look forward to my release in 2014. I have spoken to my partner and she said yoga is something we can both do. I plan to carry on with yoga and meditation on my release. In your letter you said, "Not many people on the outside of prison get enough time to themselves." I think the truth is not many people realise the benefits of yoga and meditation.

Other inmates have noticed changes with comments like, "You seem to have changed, you look different." To begin with I was worried about what other people would think or say but I am pleased to say I have had a lot of positive comments and inmates asking me to show them yoga poses. I have even made copies of the CD and handed out photocopies of the cover



which shows the yoga. I work out to the CD every day at bang up.

From HMP Exeter

While I have been practising Buddhism for some time now, I have never done any yoga. When reading *Inside Time* I came across your article "Keeping Quit" Yoga. I was pleased to be able to do a few simple routines and follow the simple step by step techniques. It works well when the jail is noisy and disruptive and meditation is interrupted by staff coming and going in and out of my cell. I can simply do yoga to enable me to relax and feel calm.



From HMP Wealstun

The CD and book *Freeing the Spirit Through Meditation and Yoga* is helping me adapt to prison life no end. I am not tense like I was. I am so much more composed and look at life in a different way, a better way. The yoga class at Armley was the best thing that has helped me through all my mess.



From HMP Frankland

My meditation is done of a night when it's quiet. I turn my light out so my room is dark, and strip down to my boxer shorts so I feel more free. Having set up my pillows I sit on top of them and



relax myself. Sometimes even when I'm concentrating on my breathing my mind wanders to the day's events and I have to stop myself and start again.

Often when I'm focussed I'm just so chilled it's amazing and nothing matters. I can forget my aches and pains which is definitely amazing cos I've been in a lot of pain for about two weeks now.



From HMP Nottingham

This morning I attended the yoga class again kindly taken by our teacher Ralph. Even though I have only attended four sessions and have only been practising basic yoga in my cell for the past three weeks, I have already found that I am more relaxed, calmer and sleeping better and more soundly. It's amazing how quickly the benefits of yoga and meditation have become apparent. There were seven of us attending today, with everyone saying at the end how relaxed they felt.

From HMP Leyhill

During my induction at Leyhill I was given an application form for your free books and CD. As a result, I have taken an interest in yoga and meditation and practise both on a daily basis. They help me cope with my sentence and bring a certain balance to my day to day life.

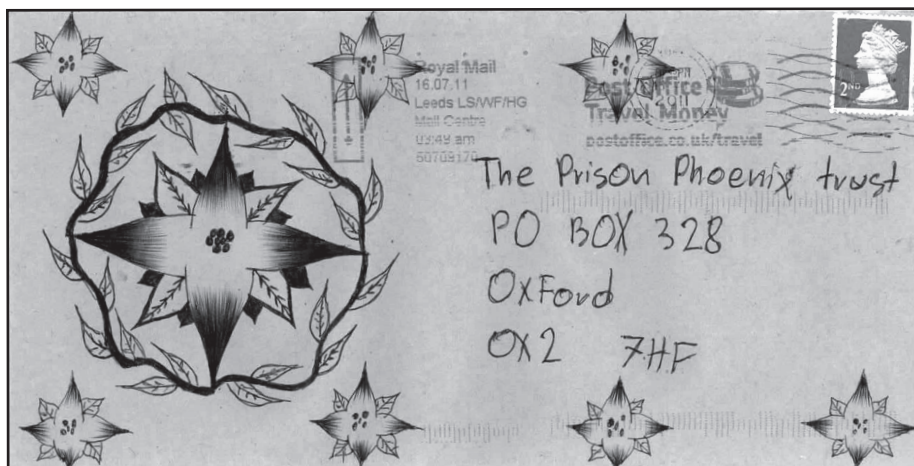


From HMP Dumfries



Thank you for holding the yoga and meditation workshop here and for the book *We're All Doing Time* and CD *Clearing the Head, Relaxing the Body*. I have my freedom again in two days' time and, believe me, the book is accompanying me on the train back to Wigan.

From the age of eighteen I worked for a removal company. This had adverse effects on my body, in particular my shoulders and vertebrae. But since I began practising yoga the aches and pains have subsided dramatically. For quite some time alcohol and cannabis have been



Envelope by Marcin, HMP Full Sutton

Letters

my pain relief. Yoga is a godsend. I will attempt to find a local group when I return home.

From HMP Leyhill



At HMP Leyhill I have joined Joan's yoga group and after 4-5 weeks I am really beginning to feel the benefits. I am able to do my own daily practice in my cell. Joan is a kind and caring teacher who is really bringing us on and I realise how lucky we are to be able to work with her.

We're All Doing Time has helped me to get started on my spiritual journey and to change my approach. The letters from prisoners, and Bo's answers to them, are enlightening and reinforce his message of freedom.

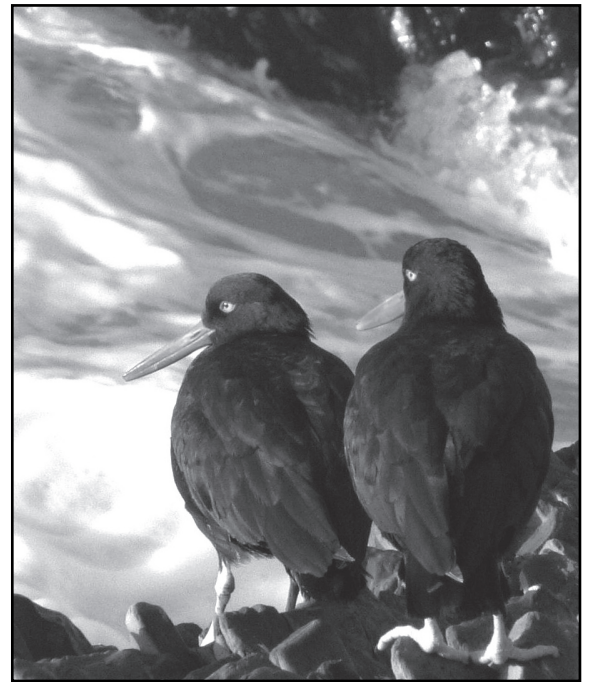
From HMP Frankland

There is a profound silence in the prison between 5 and 6 in the morning. No jingling keys, slamming doors, loud TVs or music. This is my meditation and yoga time.

Now we are having a little warmth in the air. The birds seem to be singing more. Now and again the big birds, geese and swans fly low over the prison. The sounds of their wings sound more mechanical than animal. I feel the immense power in those wings, lifting such a heavy bird into the air.

I have heard the squeal of oystercatchers again. Last year they nested and raised their young on the gym roof. I wonder if they have come back to breed again.

I am on medication to



Have they come back to breed?

control my mood swings. The medication along with my yoga and meditation keep a lid on my temper outbursts.

Meditation Corner

Dropping the Question

“Why am I here? What do the others think of me? Do I look silly?” It seems to be a fact of sitting in meditation that questions keep arising, and seem to hang around. “Which books do I need to study? Is there some course I can do or group I can join to help me become enlightened?” So the questions go on and on...

Luckily there is no qualification necessary for meditation, no ability to think and analyse, no language to learn and no examinations. Perhaps because there is no course that is simple enough!

“Why am I here?” is a question which often arises during meditation. Some people spend their whole life trying to answer this question, and never arrive at an answer that works. Today, we are going to try. But before you start analysing the long train of events that led to you ending up in prison, take a break from trying to think through an answer. Instead, find a chair and sit perfectly still and upright. Start to focus upon your breathing, and notice how each breath arises and recedes again. Let the mind settle for a few minutes and then ask the question “Why am I here?” Answers will start to



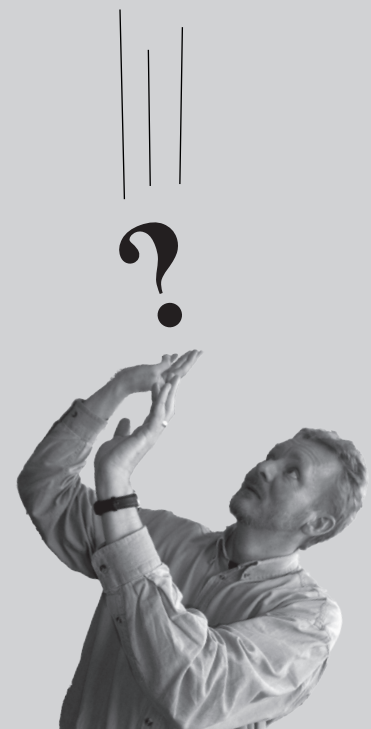
By Jason

appear: you may feel it is unfair that you are held in prison, or you may feel it is completely justified. Perhaps you feel it is only you that matters, or that you are here to serve and help others. Whatever answer arises, even if it feels like the most worthy or correct one, must now be forgotten. Return to your breathing and focus only upon each inhalation and exhalation. After several minutes, revisit the question again. You may find the answer becomes a little blurred, or keeps shifting between different ideas. Perhaps it is difficult to focus on such a question. Whatever happens, return to the breath again and repeat the questioning process a third time.

I don't know what answers will arise for you, but they will probably change each time you ask. And everyone will have different responses. But you can be sure that every time the answers are forgotten, the mind will become a little more peaceful and settled. You may even find that not thinking provides all you need to know. Just keep letting go of the

answers and the questions will also drop away, leaving you with something far more valuable and useful.

It is perfectly acceptable not to know why you are here, but don't take this as an answer. Try it for yourself and see.



The Breath of Victory



By Elaine

Victory in yoga is freedom from the tyranny in our minds that all of us struggle with. The breath described here, the breath of victory, helps us to focus, so we can see and act clearly, and relate to ourselves more harmoniously. True victory!

You can work with this breath while doing yoga postures or movements. You can also do it sitting upright and still. This is how you do it:

Sit upright on a chair or the edge of your bed, feet flat on the floor and spine upright. Tuck your chin in very slightly.

Inhale through your nose, then exhale slowly through a wide-open mouth. Direct the out-going breath slowly across the back of your throat with a quiet, drawn-out "Haaa" sound.

Repeat several times, then close your mouth. Still try to say "Haaa" even though your mouth is closed. Now, as you inhale and exhale through your nose, keep directing the breath slowly across the back of your throat. Ideally, this will create a soft hissing sound, loud enough for you to hear, but so soft someone standing next to you wouldn't notice.

Start with five minutes of practice, gradually building to 10.

When you've finished, breathe normally, with no noise, for a minute or two, then lie on your back and observe the effects. How do you feel?

The breath of victory helps you to focus and prevents your mind wandering.



Victory!

It also helps to regulate the breath and slow it down. The length and speed of the breath is controlled by the diaphragm. Strengthening the diaphragm is part of the purpose of this breath. The inhalations and exhalations should be the same length. Be careful not to tighten your throat while you do this. Can you taste victory?



Pregnancy Yoga Book Launch

We are excited to launch our new publication *Yoga for You and Your Baby*. Yoga has long been used and appreciated by mothers-to-be to help them feel better and prepare for the birth. This booklet is specially designed for women in prison, to help you take advantage of what yoga has to offer. With it, you will learn and practise movements, postures and breathing methods to help you in the months before pregnancy, during the birth itself and in the period following your baby's arrival to help you regain strength and stay focussed.

These booklets are free to pregnant

prisoners. We will be sending them to Mother and Baby Units and Healthcare Departments of women's prisons. If you would like a copy of *Yoga for You and Your Baby* or a number of copies for your unit if you are a staff member, please write to us at The Prison Phoenix Trust, PO Box 328, Oxford OX2 7HF.

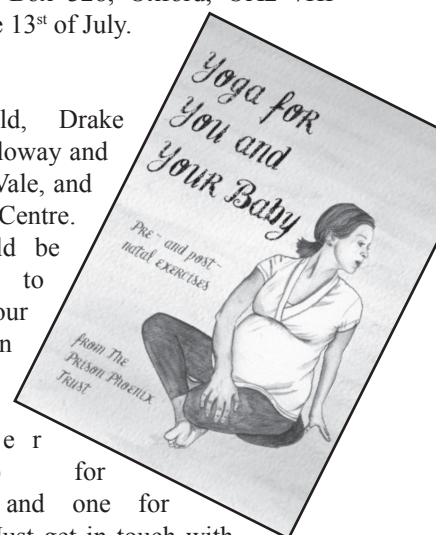
The booklet is part of our ongoing work to offer more women prisoners the tools of yoga and meditation. We also offer weekly classes and are pleased that the number of prisons with yoga or meditation sessions for women has climbed recently to seven: HMPs Send and Inverness, HMP-YOIs

Christmas Card Competition

We are once again running a competition to find this year's Christmas card design. Please send us your winter celebration or Christmas themed drawings, whether you're an accomplished artist or just getting started. We prefer original designs in colour, on plain unlined paper but black and white will also be considered. The winner will get their design printed into cards and sold to raise money for the Trust. We will send the winner 20 cards and all runners up a pack of 10 of the winning card.

To enter, please send your design to the PPT, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF before the 13th of July.

Bronzefield, Drake Hall, Holloway and Cornton Vale, and Dochas Centre. We would be delighted to visit your prison to hold a free taster workshop for inmates and one for officers. Just get in touch with us at the address above.



The Waters Remain Calm

From HMP Lindholme

If I had found this marvellous power of yoga many years ago, perhaps I wouldn't be where I am now. But the past is gone, it doesn't matter. The truth is, discovering yoga is like escaping from hell.

Quite a few lads have commented to me and have asked what my secret is. Never did I think for one minute that I would be a mentor to people, not in this way anyway. I think anybody can help anybody and I believe anybody can change if they really want to. I know I have, and I absolutely love the changes.

It can be very frustrating for people when they first start yoga, because they are waiting and expecting its magical powers to take over straight away. I tell them, the power of yoga works from minute one, but the changes are so gradual that we don't notice them until we are faced with a situation or perhaps a bit of bad news. This is certainly how it happened with me.

Soon after I got my D Cat, I applied for a town visit and this week, I got the answer: No. I put the reply down, rolled a cigarette, sat down and smiled. The waters remained calm, not even a ripple. I love the power of God and yoga.

Last Goodbyes

And there is a more dramatic example of how it has helped me. Since August 2011 my mother had been suffering from a cancerous tumour. On New Year's Day 2012 she was rushed into hospital for the last time. Four days later I was taken from Lindholme to Huddersfield Royal Infirmary to say my last goodbyes. This was after the prison had forgotten to pass a message on to me that I had to get there as fast as possible.

I was surprised at how calm I felt and even when I saw my mother I remained calm. On the 7th my Mum passed away. I had to find this out for myself because yet again messages were not passed on. I still remained calm. On the 16th it was my mother's funeral, obviously a big emotional day for the family, but we would be together and could help each other with cuddles etc. At 10.00 a.m. I



Waves engulfing the crossing to St Michael's Mount, Cornwall

was listening to Radio 2 and heard a traffic report saying that the M62 westbound had been closed due to a big pile up in the morning. This is the route we would take, so I went and told an officer about it, just to be on the safe side.

At 11.45 we set off from Lindholme and I asked if anybody had checked the road reports. I was told, "It should be clear by now." Nobody checked. We headed down the M62 and caught up with the backlog of traffic, where we sat for two hours. Eventually we turned back for the prison: I had missed my Mum's funeral.

It Was All Worth It

I was devastated and terribly upset but somehow I remained calm and accepted it. Never in my life have I been so proud of myself. The ego driven person I used to be would have gone berserk and got me into a lot of trouble.

If ever you get to see the reports from that day you will read that, even in such terrible circumstances my behaviour was impeccable. My mother would be and probably is, so very proud.

I wrote to you in one of my letters that I thought God had some more work for me to do in Lindholme. If I have been of service to God then it was all worth it.

A thing of beauty
is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases;
it will never
Pass into nothingness;
but still will keep
A bower quiet for us,
and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams,
and health,
and quiet breathing.

~ John Keats





More Similar Than Different

Paul reflects on freedom in two recent letters

It's been a week since I left the prison and it still seems like a dream. Everything out here feels quite strange. There are two things which are fundamentally different. They are space (lots of it) and choice. Otherwise all the rest is the same. We are still living in boxes, bigger ones, but boxes nonetheless. We lock our doors at night for security, but this is the same as prison. We eat, sleep and exercise, although not all of us. Which again is the same. The biggest difference is choice. Those on the outside have more choices over what they do and where they go, but it's not a vast range of choices. I'd say the similarities are greater than the differences. If the locks were taken away and the rooms made more comfortable then there is no difference. Wow, what a surprise. If the world knew this there would be uproar.

Catch 22

I met up with two good friends this week. They have stuck with me through this whole business and I respect them for their honest friendship. Only true friends stick by you in such times of hardship.

I found the Buddhist centre in Cardiff but it was shut. I'll visit again soon. It's been a bit of a shock to have so few people to talk to. In prison you are surrounded by people 24 hours a day. In the last week I have spoken to only four people at length. Even so I am confident that in time I will make new friends and acquaintances.

There are lots of little issues which could become big without mindfulness, such as the need for proof of ID. Without this you cannot open a bank account. Without a bank account you cannot receive any benefits. It's a catch 22 that no one seems to understand. With mindfulness I can see that right now I'm okay.

There are many obstacles which, had I been unprepared, would have bogged me down. But with mindfulness, there are very few real problems. We eat, we drink, we sleep and so we live. This is all of it. Why do we worry about anything? Who knows what tomorrow will bring? More calamity or perhaps more prosperity. Both of these bring their own trouble. I choose to be free of trouble by freeing my

mind. When the inside is at peace so is the outside. The inner world is reflected on the outside. I've noticed that people respond to that. They know that you are at peace and they like it.

Thanks for your most recent letter. Your encouragement over the last six months has been highly valuable. I imagine there are many like me who get the same boost every time they receive such letters.

Every day something new arises to challenge my faith and practice. This week it has been unpaid benefits and hence no money. Last week it was ID. Always there is something to challenge me and thus help renew my need for faith. What is the point of having faith and a practice if there is no challenge? As it says in the book of James, 'Consider it pure joy my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.' I believe one of the greatest benefits of this kind of trouble is to force us to look within and examine our resources. Inside there is peace, there is calm, a sense of wellbeing, of knowing that all is well. It is the eye of the needle, the bird in the cleft of the rock, the baby in the mother's arms. When you find that inner sanctuary of peace then nothing on the outside can truly disturb it.

Sitting on Molehills

Sometimes the challenges are great, sometimes they are mere molehills. I've been sitting on some of my molehills for a couple of weeks. I know they will go away like everything does. The good and the bad all fade away in the end; it's up to us to be patient.

I am living with my father at the moment, only temporarily though. He is selling his house and it could go any day. When it does sell I shall be thrown back on the mercy of the local council.

My father is 80 in a few weeks and is set in his ways. He is unable or unwilling to change his views about many things. I pass comment occasionally on his rantings about gays and blacks

and terrorists to try and add some salt but this always falls on deaf ears. This is literally true because Dad is three quarters deaf! I have learnt to let go of some of those things, although some cling on.

Wrong views about people and politics and culture cause all the conflict in the world. If only we could see that the person we consider to be our enemy is nothing more than a faulty view. I thank God that I can see this now. It needs further clarification but I am sure it will come, to the extent where there are no enemies, inside or out. If I make an enemy on the inside I have one on the outside and not the other way around.

Aware of the World

Life on the outside is not as routine as it was in prison, so daily meditation is not as easy. But I persevere and I'm slowly getting there. Without meditation things can begin to drift, but I am aware of this. It's good to be aware of my thoughts and aware of the world. From this position I can choose to stop unwanted negative thoughts creeping in, just by observing those thoughts and giving them no energy. I've learnt so much in such a short time and am grateful for the last 16 months.

These days I find that sitting on a park bench, taking in all the beauty of nature is a wonderful way to be aware and awake, to notice the wonders of the natural world. I was sitting recently in the local cemetery (very restful) and I spotted a squirrel, lying asleep on a branch half way up a big tree. It was sun bathing, like me. Fabulous, eh?!

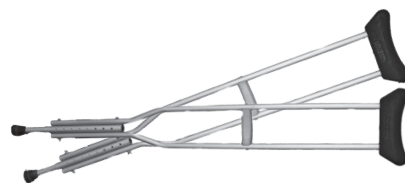


With mindfulness there are very few problems



Back on My Feet

From HMP Littlehey



In 1996 I had a very serious traffic accident. A few years later I have sat in my wheelchair and tried to walk with crutches.

Summer times were okay to walk with crutches but in the winter I had to go back to the wheelchair again. I have been on 32 different medicines since 1996. Also I had two heart attacks, several angina episodes, more than ten strokes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, impotency, incontinence and paranoia and delusional symptoms because of medicines.

In 2005, I went to prison and transferred to Littlehey in November 2010. One day I found *We're All Doing Time* by Bo Lozoff. I started to read it and to practise meditation but I was not able to do yoga because of my disability. Day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month and finally two years I continued to meditate.

I Gave Back My Crutches

In the end I stopped taking all of my medicines about 10 months ago and gave back my wheelchair and crutches to the

Health Care Department. Meditation has cured all of my health issues and now I am stronger than an eighteen year old man and I can run. I am now 55. Bo Lozoff's book saved my life.

I still continue to do the meditation. I got rid of my television from my cell. Five times a day I do half an hour's meditation and a second half hour of prayer. From Friday afternoon to Saturday and Sunday I do ten hours' meditation every day. I am 100% a prison monk, and want to learn more.



The last six months have taught me so much – it's taking a while to process it all and put it into practice. If I try too hard or force something, it all goes wrong. Finding balance between letting things happen and making sure the right things happen has been tricky. Developing a positive outlook is equally hard, but through ups and downs it would seem like right now I've got it licked. Not being complacent and knowing that life will always throw spanners in the works will only help. I know that nothing is permanent and that feelings will pass, a revelation that in essence is a consolation.

Recently while making a searching, fearless moral inventory of my life, I made a big mistake: I only included the bad and overlooked the positives. OK, the negatives far outweigh the positives. But there's always a positive in any situation. I got myself into a right state of negativity for a few days, until for some reason, I realised I have a great deal to be grateful for. From that day, I have reminded myself to be thankful for so much. I get small reminders from random sources; I'm also grateful for things we've forgotten about or simply didn't realise. And from this, I have less space for negativity.

Quietly Confident... and Anxious

Thanks for the advice on no ego. I feel like I have much more confidence in everything I do. I take a meditation class

No Space For Negativity

From HMP Wayland

in the mornings. It's only 10-15 mins but I have a few regulars. I now share in AA/NA meetings and feel like I can help others in their recovery.

I have applied for a peer supporters job, on the advice from my peers who are also supporters. I'm waiting for an answer on that, but feel quietly confident but also quietly anxious - if I get the job, will I be capable of doing it? I guess I'm capable of learning how to do it and that's all that counts. No ego!

Now and again I think I have all the answers, I get complacent and things have a nasty way of reminding me I'm far from perfect. Being mindful of this is a slow process – being mindful full stop is a slow process. But with practice and effort I am now seeing progress, not perfection. So are my girlfriend, who is in her words "so proud and so inspired by my progress" and my Buddhist minister who luckily for me works in both my local and this jail.

impressed with my progress and that I have improved physically, spiritually and mentally in the 7-8 months he's known me. I know that remark will stay with me when he's away and constantly give me strength.



He said to me that he was

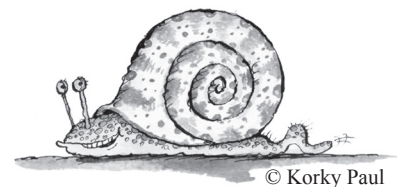
A lot to be grateful for



Solid Ground

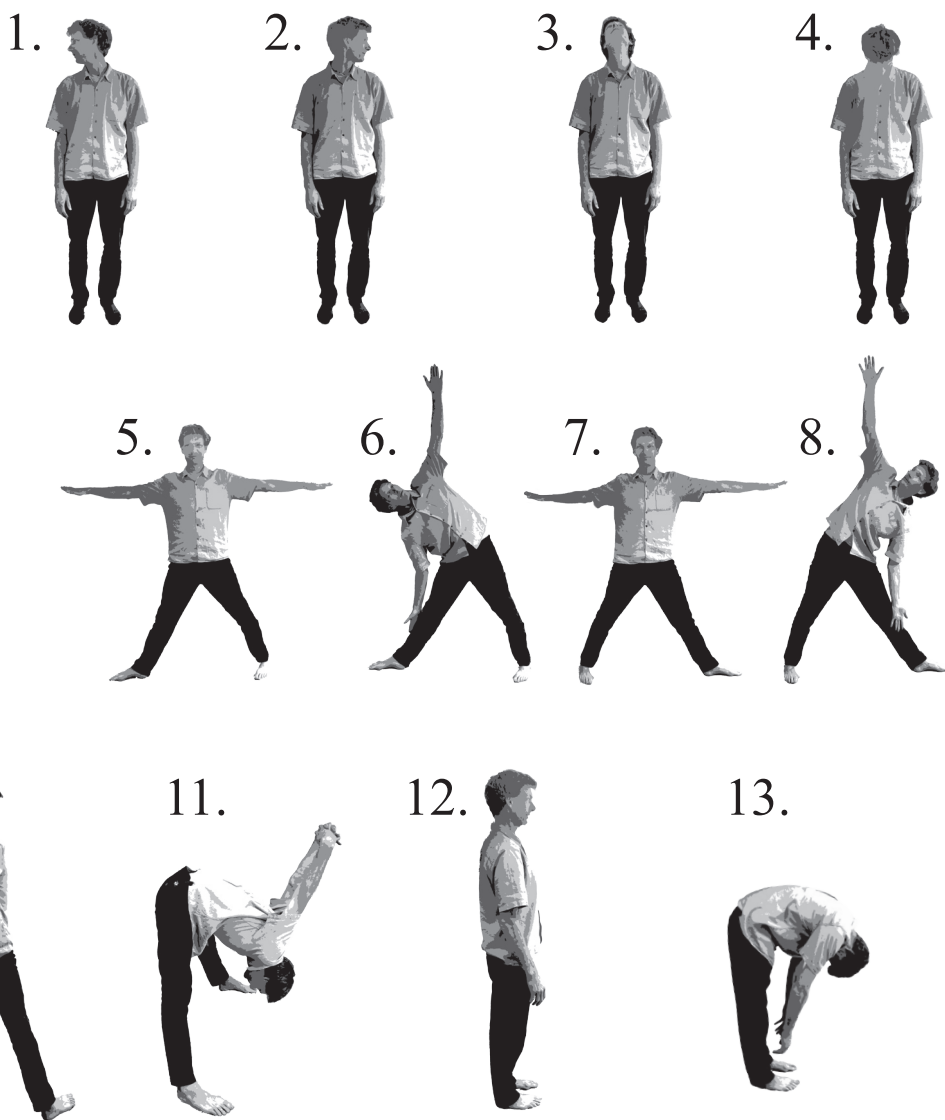


By Sally



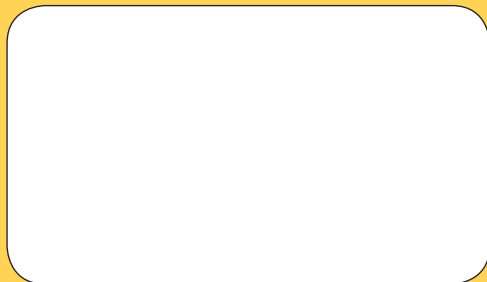
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If you've ever spent a whole day watching television or just sitting around, you'll know it leaves you feeling sluggish, restless and scattered. These postures are great at shaking those feelings off, leaving you centred, grounded and focussed. Hold each pose for 5 long, slow breaths. Enjoy!



“If we are plugged into the Source of power, we should be shot off our meditation cushions for service in this world.”

~ Sister Elaine MacInnes, Catholic nun, Zen Roshi and PPT Patron



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

