



Newsletter, Winter 2012



FINDING AN ANCHOR



A lot of people talk about how at sea they feel when they first come into prison. Our friend

on page two for example says she felt daunted and intimidated on arriving at HMP Holloway.

Even people who have been inside for some months often find it hard to feel a sense of inner security. Stress, anxiety and fear may dominate their day. Many describe their situation as precarious and say they can't relax or cope with what life is presenting.

This is completely understandable. Life, inside or outside of prison can at times feel very insecure, with no sense of anything to lean against and even small things throwing us off balance.

But she, and others, have managed to find some security, some anchor in the tumultuous life of prison. They have done this through controlling their inner world, by working with their bodies, their attention and their breath rather than dwelling endlessly on upsetting or nagging problems. This is not to say that yoga and meditation get rid of all your problems. I'm sure if we asked our friend, she'd say of course she still has challenges. But we all know that when we change how we look at a problem, that problem changes. Focussing inwards helps to develop some security of mind, so that when we look afresh at what's going on in our life, it is less overwhelming.

Strange as it may seem, a sense of peace and resolution can be found right in the middle of difficulty and emotional upheaval.



Finding peace at the yoga class at HMP Greenock

It's tempting to think that there is some other, better place or time where we will be or could be, where everything is all right. Tuning in to our breathing on a

regular basis and allowing the body to de-stress through yoga leaves us more open to finding our anchor, even in the midst of chaos. One old Buddhist master called it the coolest point in the blast furnace.

A friend who recently came out of prison said he used to take a big piece of cardboard to the yard outside his wing and meditate on the freshly fallen snow, everything deeply quiet and still. One day in the chill and stillness of his winter sitting, the slow, steady beat of a single bird's wings passing very near made him open his eyes. In the instant of seeing the crow, he knew without doubt his connection to nature. This led to a sense of security that grew stronger as he continued to work on his inner world.

You may have heard about the Oxford University's research into the effects of yoga and meditation for prisoners. Less stress and impulsiveness, better mood, improved focus and better decision making: these were the results for those inmates doing yoga and meditation. You may be like

Mike on the next page, who says he doesn't need Oxford to tell him yoga works! You may already understand that it gives you ease, even in the chaos and uncertainty which is prison.



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

“Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face.”

~ Victor Hugo, French novelist, 1802-1885

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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From HMP Rychill



I have gone through the LCD and done one or two exercises a day and found them very helpful. Two days ago though I blew it and had some bad news by letter. A so-called friend told me she never wanted contact with me again, so I impulsively overdosed and am now on an ACCT booklet for risk or suicide/self-harm. Last night though I did some yoga and a bit of meditation and it helped me sleep better. Without your book on yoga positions I would be an even bigger mess at the moment. I try to do the meditation every night. I do do it at least four times a week (This is a minimum, sometimes it's full seven times). I will definitely try to do more breathing exercises when I know I will be in a situation where I'm going to be stressed out or possibly go into a fit or bad state.

From HMP Holloway

When I first came to Holloway I burst into tears. There were lots of women who obviously I had never met and some of them, to be honest, were quite intimidating – it was a very daunting feeling. I would sit in my cell all day and night not talking to anyone – in some cases I was too afraid to. I became a lost soul, very withdrawn and depressed. That is until I saw your article in the Inside Times newspaper. I'd



tried yoga before and when I read I could get a free yoga book and CD I thought "great", why not, I've nothing to lose. A week later I received the book, *Freeing the Spirit* and the CD, *Clearing the Head*. Every day I put my disc on and went through the positions in my book. Other cell mates started asking what I was doing. I explained and a few said "Can we do it with you?" Now they have become good friends of mine. I truly owe yoga a great big thank you. Not only has it changed my body, it's given me confidence, friends and a whole new lease of life. It's fantastic – I'm in the best shape I've ever been in, my muscles are so defined and I'm very calm now due to meditation. I feel I can take on anything. It's super and best of all it is free.

From HMP Isle of Wight

Well these last few weeks have been a real joy compared to the last two years as a lifer. I was once quite sure and positive and making progress, Cat C status, looking at D status. But I went through a loss. My father passed away and when I returned from the funeral I lost all sense of well-being and slipped into a very deep pit of despair. I tried to hang myself. Luckily there were people around to help cut the sheet off etc. Over time I started to self-medicate my anxiety and depression. I am at present on a methadone detox programme. I know it's not good, but if it is possible to



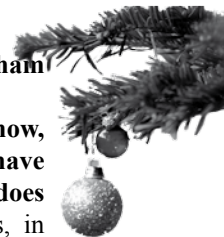
say, or believe, I am feeling very positive and much stronger within myself and do believe in myself now.

About six weeks ago a friend told me about Sue's yoga class and since that day it's been like I've been given a second chance. I've been so, so low and then suddenly it's like a light has come on and given me purpose, a sense of direction. Suddenly I have motivation, self-worth and a real want to change for the better; all the fears, apprehensions, the what-ifs are no longer stressing me. They are obviously still there within me but they are not the forces or fetters which otherwise hinder my every thought, feeling or action.

I am trying to do more with myself and going to yoga class and Buddhist meeting along with my remedial gym has improved my daily/weekly routine. Also it helps me with my anxiety, as over time I'd become quite introvert and struggled to be around too many people, but I am feeling quite proud of myself. If I can learn from this and the mistakes I've made, then if I recognise the symptoms before falling into a deep depression, then I can respond differently and get the support needed. I can learn from keeping as positive as possible, as attitude is most important to one's self and others.

From HMP Lowdham Grange

I am doing ten years now, and over two years have already passed. Where does it go? The sad thing is, in prison we wish our lives away.



I picked up a book off the yoga teacher in Belmarsh called *We're All Doing Time* and I still read it to this day. I am sure it will be with me for the rest of my life, and I have told many people about it, inside and out.

I am so sad inside and work on myself so hard to find happiness. It is so so hard. I did not have any happiness in my childhood but after about 40 counselling sessions I am starting to understand that I am a survivor, not a victim.

Your book plays a big part in my life. It makes me want to go back out and do something good in my life for other people. But first I must finish fixing myself which, believe me, is not easy. I do know the path I want to be on. But some days the cloud is so dark it scares the life out of you and just carrying that around is such a great burden.



From HMP Kirklevington Grange

Letters

From
Featherstone

HMP



Most people regret coming to prison but in some strange way I feel that if I hadn't have come then the benefits of yoga and meditation would have passed me by. I feel that yoga and meditation have helped me in more ways than just coping with prison life. I know I feel more relaxed, it's made me slow down and I seem to have more patience. While in prison I have had time to re-evaluate what's important to me.

I thought I had a lot of friends - on facebook I have 500 - but only 20 people have wrote to me in here. Like I said, coming to prison has opened my eyes. At first I asked myself, why didn't they care? All I know is the people who have taken the time to write and spend the 50p on postage, I'm gonna be there for them no matter what. Even people I had helped out in the past haven't wrote. It's true what they say - "you know who you can count on when you come to prison". I'm just happy I know who my real friends are.

In the past I was selfish. I was once with a girl for five years and had an affair and it drove a wedge between myself and my

partner. I've made that mistake and I'm never going to make it again. I feel lucky that I can trust my partner. A friend of mine in here just got his Dear John and I feel so sorry for him. I just hope I never get that letter. Only 18 months to go so my fingers are well crossed.

You don't need Oxford University to tell you that yoga and meditation work, I know it does. I have never felt this stress free since I was a young child.



From HMP Canterbury

Every night my old cell mate and I use to do meditation together, and now I do it on my own.

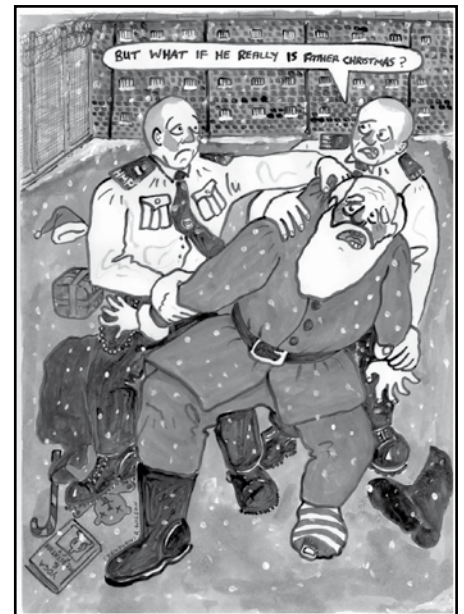
As soon as I finish with it, I just want to sleep: it's that good for me. At first I used to find it very hard to sleep in this place but now I sleep like a baby.

You offer great support to all brothers and sisters in prison, who don't have an easy time knowing their loved ones are on their own outside.

From HMP Cardiff



Yoga and meditation has helped me a lot with my anger problems. It's ancient psychology, and



From HMP Woodhill

not dressed up and rammed down your throat and doesn't patronise us by its delivery. We are lucky here to have a great yoga teacher in Mike and an awesome Buddhist guide. I'm 35 now and finally I've been given the tools to unlock the box that holds my problems.

Thanks for your help. It's overwhelming for someone to go out of their way to write me a letter of encouragement in these dark times. It really means a lot.

Meditation Corner

Not Knowing



By Jason

Have you ever pondered why you are here on earth? It is a question that humans have asked since time began. In my late teens and early twenties this is all that mattered to me. I spent many hours each day in a mixture of silence and questioning, waiting for something to arrive that would solve the riddle. I always assumed that everyone else knew the answer and I didn't!

Sometimes we receive letters from people in prison assuming meditation will provide the answer. This is perfectly understandable: since ancient times, people have used meditation to seek answers to life's fundamental questions. So why are we here on earth? Let's find out...



Sitting upright, in a chair or on the edge of your bed, adjust your posture so your head and back are relaxed and upright. Your feet should be flat on the floor and your hands resting in your lap. Keep the eyes open, but don't stare. Just let them rest half open. Now turn your attention to your breathing. Breathe silently through the nose, inhaling and exhaling evenly and calmly. Keep focussed upon the breath and allow the room to be just as it is: quiet, noisy, light or dark. If no thoughts or questions arise in your mind, great: just keeping putting all your attention into your breath. If they do arise, that is also fine. Just be aware

your mind is questioning. Don't try to answer the question. Instead, just

see how unanswerable they are. *Is anyone looking at me?* Possibly, but they may be focussed on something else, so the truthful answer is 'I don't know'. *How did I come to be in prison?* There will be a long sequence of events - it is simpler to answer 'I don't know'. *When will I be released?* You may know a date, but really this is not certain until it happens - best to answer 'I don't know' until the day arrives. By allowing yourself to say you don't really know, you aren't going into a passive, helpless mode. You can instead feel confident that not knowing is possibly the best response you can give, as it's not coming from the head.

Going back to the beginning, did I waste the best years of my life pondering questions that had no answer? Is being in prison a wasted life? The only truthful response is to genuinely not know - and at the very moment we honestly admit this, life bursts open and reveals itself in the most meaningful way possible.

Winter's Breath



By Sally

Breathing is the easiest thing in the world. It is happening to us and in us all the time without us needing to do anything, and keeps us alive.

Tuning in and working with the breath is a well-known 'secret', not just by people who do yoga, but also kung fu and other martial artists and athletes.

I was inspired by a recent letter from someone behind bars who is trying calming breathing exercises. He really wanted to have a regular practice and was sure he would feel better for it. But he found that the more he tried, the faster his breathing became, making him more anxious. This happens to a lot of us, so let's think about how we can slow the breath down.

As the nights draw in, consider how valuable it can be to withdraw into the quiet and silence within yourself. You may be busy outside your cell much of the day or you might spend a lot of time banged up with only the telly for company. Either way, when you come to do this breathing practice, switch it all off and know that this deep silence and stillness is always here, inside you, even though it may not always feel that way. When we are rushing around trying to make things happen we forget about that still and silent place in ourselves. When you sit and watch your breath, you don't have to try to change it in any way: it is fine the way it is. So sit with an attitude of complete acceptance.

To help relax the body before you do

your breathing practice, it can help to have a good stretch – whether that's for five minutes (see back page) or something much longer, it doesn't matter. Finally, to do this practice, all you do is observe your breathing. Notice each in-breath and each out-breath. Every time you breath out, feel your shoulders becoming a little heavier and your back a little taller. You may notice after a while that you are breathing more slowly and deeply.

The Countryside Sleeps



When you sit ready to begin your practice be aware that at this time of year the natural world is withdrawing into itself reaching for that still silent place within. Winter is a time when all life begins to slow down. The leaves fall from the trees, animals look for somewhere to sleep, and many of us humans spend more time indoors. Life goes within and there is a pause as if nature is holding its breath. The countryside waits and sleeps.

Do not try to change your breath. Just be still and notice your chest gently rising and falling. Notice how the in-breath is cool on the upper lip and warm as you breathe out. With each out-breath notice your muscles letting go a little more. Along with all life, allow yourself to withdraw into the silent, still place.

After 10 minutes, or longer, of sitting quietly focussing on your breathing in this accepting, focussed, inward way, finish by breathing a little deeper. Feel the energy return. You may feel refreshed and strong as you go about your day or evening, rejuvenated and alive, just as all life does after the winter sleep.



Notice the warmth of your out-breath

License to Chill!

You may know what his favourite drink is, and have followed his adventures fighting bad guys, but did you know Bond practises yoga? Daniel Craig, the most recent actor to play James Bond, uses the discipline of yoga as part of his fitness regime.

Bond is not the only tough guy to have seen the benefits of yoga. The British Army use yoga as part of their basic training, and have for many years. In fact, some say that the army were the first people to practice yoga in the UK, after picking it up in India in the 1920's.

From Aston Martin to Lotus, we're sure Daniel Craig will enjoy his new position!



If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each man's life a sorrow and a suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



Spanning All Religions



People take up meditation for all kinds of reasons. Some people want to de-stress, some do it to be more efficient and creative, and some feel they might find a clearer understanding of what we're all doing here. For a lot of people, meditation helps access something bigger than themselves by letting thoughts fall out of the way.



“Regularly perform thy meditation at the decline of the sun, till the first darkness of the night and at the prayer of daybreak; for the meditation of daybreak is glorified by the Angels. In some part of the night be wakeful and in the same way make an extra time and maybe the Lord will raise thee to a position of great glory.” **The Qur'an**, 17:78-79



We encourage people to meditate by focussing on the breath, finding stillness and silence inside. All of the world's religions encourage exploration of inner stillness and speak clearly about the benefits. It is something that can support and fit easily with your faith, if you have one. Below, we share what some of you have written about how meditation ties in with other practices and prayer. We'd love to hear from others about how your meditation helps you understand your faith or what it means to be alive, and how you fit it in with other things you do. Drop us a line!

From Carstairs Hospital

Imeditate every evening at eight for about half an hour. For me it lets go of any stresses I've had that day. Usually after about five minutes into the meditation I go into a state of deep relaxation. I try to remain focussed on the breath though sometimes I'll pray or use scripture verses or even just give attention to my emotions or senses, even my physical body sensations. For the last few nights I've been quite in tune with my thoughts, yet at the same time trying to gain an understanding that thoughts are just thoughts.

From HMP Altcourse

Meditation helps me relax and release emotion at times of stress and upset. I did bits before I came to prison and always had an interest in this area. Now it's really aiding me in here.

Let me share with you a technique I use daily in meditation and when I'm upset. It's very effective. It's known as Ho'oponopono and comes from Hawaii. I first heard about it twelve years ago. I was told about a psychiatrist who worked in a busy hospital and had many patients to deal with. Instead of going around to meet them, he would simply be on his own in his office with the person's file in front of him. While looking through it he would concentrate all his efforts on that person while reciting over and over the following mantra – “I am sorry, please forgive me, I love you, thank you.”

It was noted that patients began to get well and in time were discharged. I don't remember all the exact details of why this works, but essentially the practice of Ho'oponopono is that everything in our life and other people and all the bad and good going on is everyone's responsibility. Too much bad feeling has affected the world and Ho'oponopono corrects this by becoming one with the divine power of the universe. The method can be changed to suit religions by adding “Dear God/Allah/Jesus” before the mantra. I've found by doing this method and focussing on people who don't seem to get along with me, they start to say hello and don't seem to have a problem.

From Bombat Klang Piset Prison Thailand

Meditation and yoga have changed my lifestyle totally. I can sleep any time I want and I feel very relaxed now in my life. I hope to witness more feelings in this practice.

I use meditation and yoga to get ready for my prayer, it makes my body and soul to be in spirit. I will see myself as if I'm with God – no distraction of thoughts. Many of my fellow inmates think it's only the Buddhists that practice meditation and yoga. I told them, this is the control of breathing, it doesn't matter whether you are Christian, or Muslim, or any other religion. I told them even the Bible said we have to be still (silent) unto the Lord Jesus. Anyway, not everyone believes me, but I won't stop doing my practice every day.

“If I meditate on heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell; you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me fast.” **Jewish Scriptures**, Psalm 139:8-10



“But their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.” **The Bible**, Psalm 1:2-3

“It is good to tame the mind, which is difficult to hold in, and flighty, rushing wheresoever it listeth: a tamed mind brings blessings.” **The Dhammapada**



“Meditation is in truth higher than thought. The earth seems to rest in silent meditation; and the waters and the mountains and the sky and the heavens seem all to be in meditation. Whenever a man attains greatness on this earth he has his reward according to his meditation.” **The Upanishads**

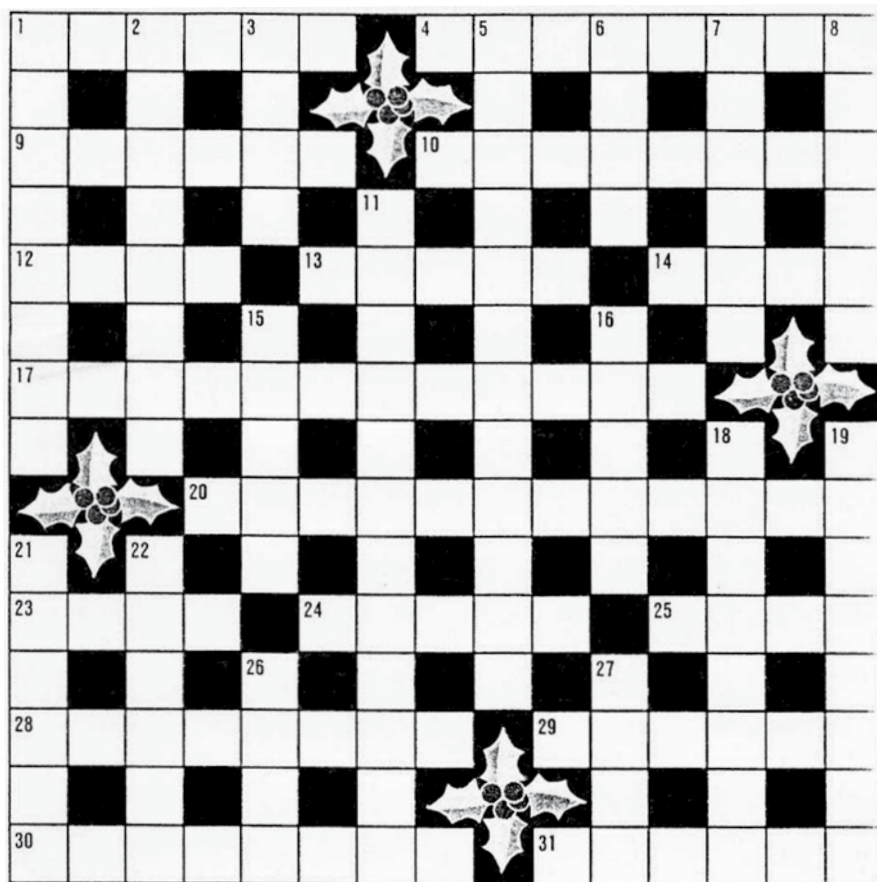


Cryptic Christmas Cracker

Roger Squires, Guinness Book of Records champion compiler, publishes in many national newspapers, such as the Telegraph, the Guardian and the Financial Times. He has created over 70,000 crosswords. Here is his 17th PPT winter puzzle for you to crack. Tip: two brains are better than one, so try this puzzle with a friend! (Solutions on p. 7)

Across

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Waits to sing these (6) | 20 Aladdin's lamp, perhaps? (5,7) |
| 4 Mince-pie first taken up by the few? (8) | 23 Overcharge for the bird (4) |
| 9 High spirits? (6) | 24 House party in a rut, perhaps (5) |
| 10 Chop up bird cooked and eaten at Christmas (5,3) | 25 A way to cool punch (4) |
| 12 Ponder about how to make ale warm and spicy (4) | 28 Councillor returns thanks to child – Tiny Tim (8) |
| 13 Transport for Cinderella may be on the cards (5) | 29 It's futile backing a party, it's impracticable (2,4) |
| 14 Courage needed on icy roads (4) | 30 When there's rain and snow falling Neil gets upset (8) |
| 17 Pity a vital ingredient in New York seasonal entertainment (8,4) | 31 It's natural to see a robin round about the start of Noel (6) |



Down

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Delightful prince in panto (8) | 15 Scotsman goes after a number of birds (5) |
| 2 Control a toboggan rising in speed (8) | 16 A popular place to get spirits? (5) |
| 3 Swing to a carol, perhaps, till dizzy (4) | 18 Being rich, we shall have to have a party (4,2,2) |
| 5 Aladdin, for instance, is capital young fellow (9,3) | 19 Housebound after heavy fall in winter (6,2) |
| 6 Gather it's what children like to eat at parties (4) | 21 Signs likely to be kicked over by Santa's reindeer? (6) |
| 7 Not wholly employed in pantomime (2,4) | 22 Gift had teacher worried (6) |
| 8 Puts up the tree, perhaps, in a secret way (6) | 26 Reindeer tail cut to a point (4) |
| 11 Money you give for a present (12) | 27 Scattered snow about (4) |

Still Time to Order this Year's Christmas Cards ...



These full colour cards, illustrated by a prisoner from HMP Woodhill, are for sale to friends inside and outside of prison at £5 for a pack of 10 and can be seen in colour on our website. To order, send your name, address, how many cards you'd like and your payment to: The PPT, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF. If your prison is sending payment for you, you still need to send us your details.

... And Paint or Draw Next Year's

While you're in the holiday spirit, we are holding a competition to find the illustration for next year's Christmas card. 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 have their design printed into cards, sold to raise money for the Trust. We will send the winner 20 cards and all runners up a pack of 10.



I'm In The Right Place

From HMP Leyhill

In February I helped deliver a workshop on the experience of older prisoners at a "Quakers in Criminal Justice" conference. I came away feeling that I'd received a great deal more than I had given. Haven't done any public speaking for many a long year but found that, much like riding a bicycle, once I got started I felt quite at ease.

I say "thank you" every day for the blessings in my life, of which there are many. Whatever serenity lies at the centre of my being flows from accepting ownership of everything I have done in life, not least of the hurt and sadness I have caused other people. That acceptance is rooted in the knowledge that there is a purpose in everything that happens.

When psychologists tell me they think I am being stoical, some say philosophical, about the length of time I have been in prison and I reply that I believe I am in exactly the right place, at the right time, to learn things I need to know, they look at me rather quizzically. I find it difficult to explain to them that there are things I have come to "know" since I began sitting in meditation. I can't always put into words what it is that I "know" or how I came to know these things. Neither would I suggest that what it is that I "know" is of any particular use to another. But I am sure that whatever it is is right for me.

Follow The Heart

If one believes, as I do, that life has a purpose, a meaning, then it follows that there is something beyond what we know as life. What I have come to accept is that life is but a preparation – albeit an oft repeated preparation – for something else. What this something else is I do not know, and would not even want to hazard a guess, and I might even be wrong: perhaps there is no purpose.

It doesn't really matter either way. What matters is that we follow the leadings of the heart and not the head and seek to be as kindly and loving as possible to all things, animate and inanimate, during our lives. If doing this achieves nothing other than making someone else's life a little more bearable then that surely is worth

the effort, isn't it? If, on the other hand, there is a purpose to life then at least we will have done something towards gaining a better understanding of our true nature.

Life on Release

Don't Give Up

By David

Iwould like to let all the prisoners know that yoga and meditation are good things to do. I still do yoga and when I was in prison I meditated all the time. I know what it's like being in prison without your loved ones.

When I told my Mum and Dad that I was a gay man they didn't want any more to do with me. They just kicked me out of the house when I was 16, and I ended up in a prison home. I have been in and out of prison for a long time – I am now 55 years old.

Now I'm out, it is the best thing. When I went into prison all my friends and family didn't want to know me. Now I'm out and doing well. I'm looking forward to getting my first flat and having time with my new friends. If you're in prison just think to yourself – next time you go away you might not see anyone again. To anyone who is gay, all I say is, do not give up.

Jeremy Gets Reel

In a seven minute video made recently by ReelAid, actor and Prison Phoenix Trust patron Jeremy Irons speaks passionately about the work and history of the PPT. If you have internet access, you can watch it on the "About Us" section of our website, and share the link with friends. Many thanks to Andy and the ReelAid crew, and to Jeremy for this wonderful gift!



ReelAid Director Andy
working with Jeremy Irons

Comfort and Joy

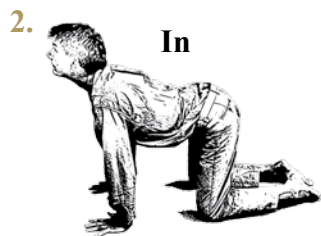


By Lucy

There are many things that yoga can help with – sore back, sleeplessness and feeling anxious, for instance. But yoga can also just feel nice to do. This routine will help with the problems listed above, but most importantly, it's for you to enjoy. Happy holidays from us all!



Lie like this and count ten deep, slow breaths. Feel the air going deep into your belly.

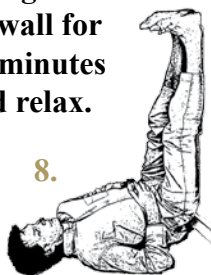


Breathe as you move between these two. Repeat ten times.



Five breaths in each.

Lie with your legs against the wall for five minutes and relax.



Sit and focus on your breath, letting your thoughts drop away. Stay for ten minutes.



“All creatures are the same life, the same essence, the same power; the same one and nothing less.”

~ Henry Suso, German mystic, 1300 - 1366

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. If you'd like an extra copy of the newsletter to show friends who might also like to support the Trust, please let us know.

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

