



## Newsletter, Autumn 2013



# STEPPING BACK

**W**hen you're up against hard situations or when everything is kicking off at once, your first instinct may be to try to figure your way out of it or through it. Our brains are great at this. It's one of the things they do, and it's a way that most of us are used to. Completely normal.

But what if, when you are in the middle of some awful period in your life, or you find yourself in a scene where some action seems to be demanded of you – what if, instead of acting through your thinking or trying to figure things out, you actually step back from that familiar choice of acting and doing, and instead simply be with what is going on? What if you could switch out of the mode of trying to fix it all and just allow what was going on?

This may sound impossible, but many of you tell us about doing just this regularly, sometimes because you have no choice: the depression has become so bad, or your medication has been cut, or you simply don't see another way. And somehow, in an unexpected way, things often clear themselves up. This is what a prisoner friend says on page two. Not only did he manage to get through horrific heartbreak, he found he was sitting on a powerhouse of creativity.

Similarly, a friend on page four talks about the temptation of getting back into crime once he was out. It was hard, but he took a step back, remembered the peace he had found at times while in prison, and – with a lot of work and help – was slowly able to cultivate that peace again and be more the person he wanted to be. Not easy. But completely worth it.

His stepping back was a matter of lifestyle choices and actions. But he's also talking about the moment-to-moment activity in the mind and heart that's subtle: quite hard to spot unless you're

really paying attention. He knows that the condition of his mind sets the scene for the whole of his life. And he knows the state of his mind affects the lives of others as well. Because he was in the habit of sitting in meditation, he could sit still, focussing on his breath and see his old mental habits. Through this practice, he had developed the capacity for patience, and for not responding to his old impulses. He realised that it is possible to not engage

with his own mind in any of the familiar ways – on this really fine level of the mind, moment to moment. That is not only possible for all of us, but also it leads to a better feeling about being alive and about who we are.

It's not just when we're in the middle of difficulties that we can step back

from the usual activity of the mind. When things are going okay or even really well,

you can also do it. In fact, if you're interested in meditation, that's the whole idea: no matter how glorious or hellish or ho-hum things seem, bring yourself back again and again to the simplicity of the breath, letting everything else go. Let go of the habit of following the emotions and thoughts. Discover that by letting go of that habit, how you act, think and feel actually becomes more harmonious and enjoyable.



**Women at HMP Bronzefield find openness and energy**



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

**“Learn to take the backward step that turns the light and shines it inward.”**

*~ Dogen Zenji, Japanese Zen master, 1200 - 1253*

### 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-focussed 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, CDs, newsletters, free taster workshops and weekly classes.*



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# Coming Unstuck?

 By Jason

**H**ow annoying to be labelled like the contents of a tin! It happens all the time: celebrity, teenager, VIP, prisoner, screw, politician, VP, yogi, gangster. The list goes on and it seems no one is immune from being labelled. Over the years I've been a pupil, apprentice, biker, engineer, zen meditator. All of these are the result of someone sticking a label on the tin, sometimes without understanding what's inside.



Thankfully, when the mind is still and quiet, these labels tend to float away, rather like soaking the label in water and watching it unstick. By sitting upright, with the body in alignment and perfectly still, our attention can focus on each breath, silently inhaling and exhaling through the nose. Gradually we can see that every label we are given is based on an opinion. This may be someone else's opinion, or it may be ours. But we can be certain we were not born with this label, whether it be good or bad. And so the label starts to unpeel. The mind may start to think again – 'I am a prisoner'. This is another opinion and one we can choose to feed. But at this very moment there is no prison, there is just the vast emptiness of the mind. All our labels, opinions, hopes and fears start to disappear as each moment passes. There is no label which will ever describe ourselves accurately, and so we are free to be whoever we wish each moment.

You may feel concerned that a blank unlabelled tin will never be chosen for anything useful. But this never happens – labels start to appear again immediately. So when you pick up a pen, you become a writer. Can you play the guitar? You're a musician. Even when you are snoozing a 'do not disturb' label appears.

Keep sticking and peeling! But be certain you wear the labels lightly; you are always more than any opinion, definition or label can describe.



From Cork Prison

**L**ast year you sent me *Becoming Free Through Meditation and Yoga and We're All Doing Time*, plus your CD. They have been put to great use.

What a roller coaster I have been on since I last wrote. Not long after my last letter, I found out my wife had met someone else. I was heartbroken, have never in my life felt any pain like it. The darkest parts of my mind revealed themselves. I started to fall apart. My life was over. After all I had been through in my life, how was this happening to me? She had always stood by me, the only person who really knew me. How could I go on without her? I cried bitter tears but I continued to meditate. I started to meditate more, did the yoga every morning. Slowly but surely I started to feel better and I started to accept that she was gone and instead of blocking out my feelings with drink and drugs like I would have in the past, I learned to sit with my feelings, accept them. I have gone from strength to strength. I am doing great now, thank God. I could not have done it without the meditation and yoga.

Through the pain I started to write. I wrote poems to my wife saying sorry for the way I had been before, explaining how I knew the pain I had put her through and how I will always love her.

From HMP Perth

**M**editation and yoga has been a godsend, a gift that



I have readily welcomed, as I was in solitary and still am, in a different prison. I didn't really know much about it three months ago until I was cut off Diazepam, which I have been a prisoner to for too long.

Anyway, I now feel the best I have done in years, my concentration is superb, my fitness has reached levels I previously thought were unattainable. I feel meditation is a serendipitous gift and sometimes wonder if I deserve such a beautiful thing. I'm no angel as you know. But meditation makes me feel calm. It often seems like when I look at everyday objects, I'm seeing them for the first time. Insights into myself and others sometimes pop into my head without much thought. I really don't understand where it comes from. I've never been so amazed and enthralled by something more than practising meditation.

# Prisoners'

From HMP Send



**T**his might sound silly but I feel honoured to have my own copy of *We're All Doing Time* as I have suggested to friends and to some of my peers to read it as it helped me so much during my RAPT treatment and hope it will inspire others as it did me, and continues to inspire me as I read it again.

The article you sent me came at the right time as I had begun to chase the 'goal' of the few times I have had or experienced the great spiritual magic and I began to feel frustrated and disappointed that I was not able to recreate these experiences every time, agonising and obsessing: what am I doing wrong, what am I forgetting to do? Chasing rapture was ruining my meditation practice. So thank you again. I'm back on track again enjoying the sitting and the breath, not chasing rapture.



From HMP Wayland

**A**t HMP Wormwood Scrubs I tried meditation a few times and did yoga and meditation with a yoga peer but here there is meditation in the chapel every Wednesday. It is helpful and fun; I've met friends there. The woman who does it is called Joyce, a nice woman who teaches us well. I've gone around 12 times.

I'm a new me and I'm healthier, stronger and mentally wiser now, with the support of you guys and many others in this marvellous life journey which gets better with time.

From HMP Liverpool



**M**y drug of choice is heroin, but to be honest I'll try anything to get a buzz. I am basically a reoffender - nine sentences - and a long term drug user. But I've had enough. I am 43 years old.

At the moment I am on remand for my fourth strike burglary on a dwelling, so I'm looking at a three year sentence.

I am on medication for mental health issues, and have been given a single pad as I am considered high risk. I have reached the point in life I feel despair and desperation.

All this going on, plus family problems and feelings of guilt towards my two girls. I feel I have let them down big time and I have hardly been there for them or their mum.

# Letters

These feelings of guilt, stress and anger at myself are preying on my mind all the time.

I have told the doctor and my support worker here, who is trained in mental health as a nurse and she has organised some psychology programmes for me, and she also suggested I take up yoga, something she has done for years herself.

I have always kept fit in jail, using the gym regularly, and I was also an amateur wrestler in my youth – eventually becoming England Champion in my age group and weight category. That was years ago, but I still train hard in the gym.

I was reading *Inside Time* yesterday and saw your yoga instructions, so I thought I would try it out today, as I have been a bit more stressed than usual – someone has blown the electricity so our TVs aren't working.

I went through all the sequences, taking my time and using the breathing techniques, stretching properly and slowly. I really enjoyed it and to my surprise I feel a whole lot better. My restlessness has gone, and I have sat down to write this letter to say thanks.

I am going to go through the routine again now. You have introduced me to something new, and I feel excited about doing the routine again!



## From HMP Wayland

**R**eally good news today: my funding for rehab was granted! I'm so glad I persevered and didn't give up after the first refusal, as I would have done in my previous life. That life I lived seems such a long time ago and it's taken a long time to get this far on my journey. I'm so grateful for all the support and guidance I've received with my spiritual growth.

While I was inside the madness of crime and addiction looking out, everyone "normal" looked mental. But now I'm on the outside looking in, the madness sure looks unappealing, ugly and disgusting. Something I don't ever want to be involved with or associate with any more. The paradox of becoming free by being locked up, amazes and astounds me every time I think about it!

I can now see what I was trying to achieve while filling my body and mind with drugs as synthetically trying to reproduce what I get now. Spirituality. But with drugs it's like filling a basket with

water. It will always leak away, leaving it empty and in need of filling again. No matter how much or how quickly you fill it, it always leaves you wanting and needing more.

But now I'm filling my basket with stuff of substance: mindfulness, Dharma, awareness and spirituality. This needs maintaining, but doesn't leak away. So long as I don't do drugs or defile myself with crime and dishonesty I'm sure my basket will continue to be filled with goodness.

I've gained so much from this sentence, mostly freedom from the crap I once called life. I've got endless possibilities now, the world's my oyster and my future is now bright. I've got a balance in my life, whereas before practically everything was negative. Now practically everything is positive. I now know to choose the middle path, neither positive or negative. I've far from mastered this, but do see the benefits in action.

Most of my 40 years have been spent in darkness. Occasionally there were brief moments of clarity and light, but mainly darkness. Now I'm bathed in a good light, and need only to carry on what I'm doing to keep it lit.

I can think of nothing that is a worthy reward that comes from something simple and easy. The best things come from a hard fought battle, which I've been fighting for all of my three year sentence. The battle is far from over, in fact it has only just begun. But I gather the fruits from my labours on a daily basis. Oh boy, do they taste divine.

## From HMP Lindholme

**Y**our book, *Freeing the Spirit Through Yoga and Meditation*, has been a lifeline to me. I was



sentenced to two months and was on quite a lot of methadone as I had used heroin before that. I set about reducing my daily amount as soon as my sentence began, but truly it was learning to meditate and practising yoga that helped me learn to relax and find inner peace.

After moving here to a semi open prison in May I have reduced my methadone to nothing, so I am now clean. This has taken me four months. I will continue to meditate and carry on with my asanas daily. Even though I'm not outside in the world yet, my mind and body are free.

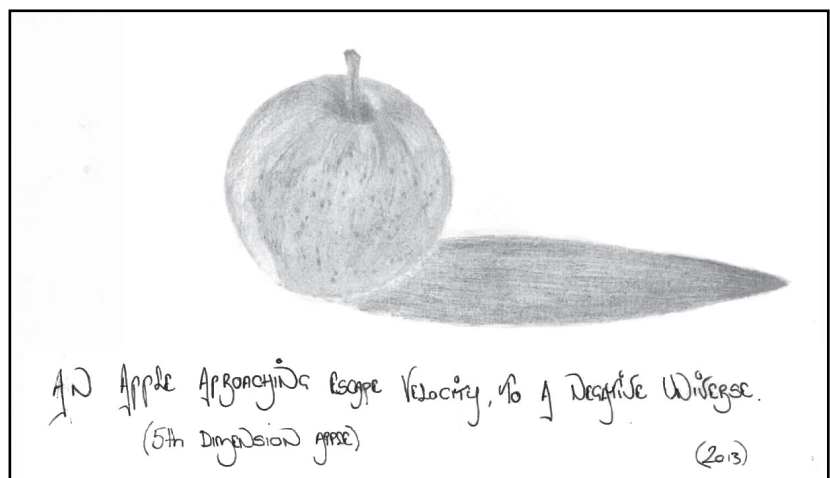


## From HMP Pentonville

**T**hank you for the CD and books, including *Becoming Free Through Yoga and Meditation*. I continue to find peace and more peace and harmony as I journey through its new path.

It feels absolutely bliss and like magic how yoga relaxes the body, mind and soul. I could feel every bit of my muscles relax whenever I clear my head and get right into meditation.

This is such a useful tool every prison needs. It is disappointing that the books you sent me were withheld by the prison for two months before they were given to me. But that doesn't matter any more as I found the tool kit that unlocks every bit of negative emotion.



Drawing by Rory Mackay, HMP Perth

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



# Never Giving Up

By Thomas

**I** have been finding it difficult to write this letter because towards the end of my sentence I found peace and happiness plus the focus and drive to live my life correctly through Buddhism and yoga. But when released I decided I no longer needed to practice it but will just live it.

During my time in prison I reached the end of the line with my anger. No matter which way I turned I was trapped. It came to the point that I would spend forever inside if I didn't change. Once I came to this realisation I had to find a way out. It came from a man who I frequently trained with, who did yoga and meditation and was a Buddhist. I was interested in yoga for reducing the risk of injury, the rest was a natural progression.

I had to teach myself a whole new way of dealing with confrontation and problems with others (which prison is full of). I did this through focussing my own behaviour, metta, and the removal of fetters. This was a very difficult place to do this but I managed it.

My mind became clear. I felt remorse but realised I must move forward. I put plans into motion and they worked as I had a clear focus and something positive in my life to live by and follow.

## My Path was Written

Upon my release my path was written: I would work, have a family, and move towards buying a home. All things attainable. I was lucky to find work through a family member almost immediately. It was agreed that I could leave the hostel and move to a place down in Peterborough so that I could start.

It was during this time that life began to get difficult again. I was still a Buddhist but no longer practising through reading, just trying to live the Buddhist life. I ceased to meditate.

The temptations became too much. My peer group lived a different type of life from what I envisioned. Drugs, drinking,

fighting, macho. I became disillusioned. I didn't fit. These people seemed no different from the ones inside prison.

Over time I still searched for my goals but went along to an extent with these other people. I ended up in some minor skirmishes and fought while out drinking. I was even tempted to go back to crime.

I headed home to Newcastle. I was torn between my past life and present. All along with my Buddhism burning inside. When I wanted to return to my peace and calm I tried to bring others with me but they made out I was stupid. So I gave up, but kept my own belief.

## Peace and Happiness

I met my partner after a year of being home. Sarah is a lovely person, life has thrown a lot at her but she never takes out



Thomas, Sarah, Jack and baby Thomas

her problems by hurting others. We have a five year old step son (her son) and have had another child now, Thomas, who is Jack's younger brother. We have had some difficult times, though we have never given up on each other. I love my wife to be with all my heart.

Only recently I have begun to practice Buddhism, meditation and yoga again. I know what it did and does for me. It helps me centre, find calm within myself and develops my emotions in the right way.

I am doing well at work and have signed up for a second year of Open University since my release, this time doing maths and engineering. I have found the motivation to continue my path. I plan to be an engineer for Nissan until I retire. They gave me a chance.

Someone once said I am tenacious. I believe only that I channelled my energies and learnt enough through Buddhist teachings and meditation to know what is required of me. This is what is right for me for my peace and happiness and for my loved ones.

One more thing – the man who brought me into this was a fellow prisoner called Leroy. I'd like to thank him.

## Oxford Uni Research Confirms: Yoga Works!

**L**ast year the Prison Phoenix Trust worked with Oxford University when they ran research in seven West Midlands prisons. The researchers were looking at what happens to people in prison who join a 10-week yoga class. We're happy to say that the results, published this summer in the Journal of Psychiatric Research, back up what prisoners tell us every week: yoga and meditation help override impulsiveness, improve mood, decision making and concentration, and reduce stress.

If you're out of prison on 3<sup>rd</sup> October, you're welcome to join us in Oxford at the 2013 Prison Phoenix Trust lecture where the researchers will discuss their findings. Erwin James, journalist and former prisoner, will open the evening and a representative from NOMS will comment on the implications for prison regimes. Guests will need to contact us in advance, and pay £5.

## Great Moments in Grendon...

**T**he PPT celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> year in style in July at HMP Grendon. Most memorable moments? Mark from the prison, holding staff, prisoners and guests rapt with his drumming, and Derek, recounting his three years in the Grendon yoga class. PPT Patron Jeremy Irons chatting with prisoners over supper, before performing dramatic readings. Jazz giants Andy Sheppard and Kuljit Bhamra working magic with their sax and tabla playing. And BBC auctioneer Charlie Ross raising a very healthy amount of lolly during the auction, during which Jeremy Irons entered and lost a bidding war for a caricature drawing of himself on a flying motorbike! The evening was a fantastic celebration of the energy poured



Jeremy at Grendon

into the Trust over the years, not least by people in prison who have delved into the silence of meditation and yoga to discover rich rewards. Hats off to all involved that evening. And here's to another 25!



# Seeing a Bigger Picture

## From HMP The Mount



**I started practising yoga on the advice of a spinal injury specialist.** He recommended yoga poses to benefit my condition and help stop me deteriorating. I basically used the poses as a form of stretching to improve the range of movement in the lumbar spine. This was very helpful. It reduced the pain and got my joints more supple so I could start using the gym.

About a year ago I started looking at the full system of yoga, what it entailed how it benefits the individual and in turn benefits others. I began a daily practice of meditation and made a conscious decision to refrain from harming – the concept of non-violence. That included not eating meat or fish, not swatting flies and also watching my interaction with others, being careful not to cause harm in action or words.

Through these small steps a complete change in my outlook, views and nature

took place. I continued learning, I spoke with others who follow this path, I shared my experiences with others, friends, family. My partner and I have grown closer together and our relationship blossomed even though I am incarcerated.

I encountered difficulties along the way but by accepting the way things are I maintained some sense of calm. Yoga also lead me back to Buddhism which I had had contact with some years ago. I've done a great deal of soul searching, patience and looking directly at the feelings I've spent years running away from.

suffer with physical pain my mind feels light.

I will never stop the practice of yoga for as long as I breathe. I believe it's the most important aspect of my life. It has transformed me and never stops giving. Once I am released from prison, I will be contacting The British Wheel of Yoga to enquire about starting a diploma in yoga and possibly train to become a teacher. These are high aspirations. Wherever this journey takes me I will be grateful.

People use the yoga practices for many reasons. For some it is a relaxing escape, for some it's a recovery from injury and for others it's a life long dedication of self development. The more yoga in prison the better. It helps to calm people, it helps people look inside, to see a bigger picture. Prison is the hardest environment to let down the barriers, to soften the heart, to open up, but yoga helps with all of these things.

### Light Mind

I've been totally animal-product free for around six months now. Not only does it ensure the minimal amount of suffering, my health has improved. The initial problem with my spine which lead me to yoga has got worse, but this is probably the best I've felt in my life. Even though I

## ... and Participants Party in Dublin!

Meanwhile, across the Irish sea, a band called the Participants held a benefit gig for the PPT at Dublin's Cobblestone Pub. The band, open to ex-offenders, grew out of the music class at Pathways, a programme for the reintegration of ex-prisoners and offenders through education and counselling in Dublin. At the gig, a former prisoner, now drug free partly through yoga and meditation, read some poetry too. If you've got You Tube access, type in 'Participants Gig for Phoenix Trust' to hear a sample of their great music. Cheers to Willi, Lu Lu, The Bone Man, The Ace, Clinchy, Digger and Brian the Lion - and everyone else who made the evening so special!

## Christmas Cards

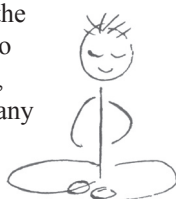
This beautiful full colour drawing is this year's PPT Christmas card competition winner. The inside message is from the Greek poet Pindar: "Every gift which is given, even though it be small, is in reality great, if it is given with affection." You can see it in colour on our website. To order, send this form with payment to: The PPT, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF. If your prison is sending payment for you, you still need to send us the form.



The winning Christmas card, drawn by a frined at Rowanbank Clinic

## Silent Celebration

Please join us, wherever you find yourself, in spending 30 minutes in meditation together from 3.00 - 3.30pm on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September. This is to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bo and Sita Lozoff founding the Human Kindness Foundation, whose work in America is closely linked to our own. As many of you know, we send Bo's book, *We're All Doing Time*, to people in prison. We look forward to sitting with all of you on the 21<sup>st</sup>!



### Christmas Card Order Form

- Please send me 1 pack of 10 cards at £5.
- Please send me \_\_\_\_ additional packs of 10 cards at £4 per pack.
- I enclose a cheque payable to The Prison Phoenix Trust for £ \_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prison number (if in custody) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Post code \_\_\_\_\_

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



# Yoga: Your Flexible Friend

By Tony Parsons, journalist and author

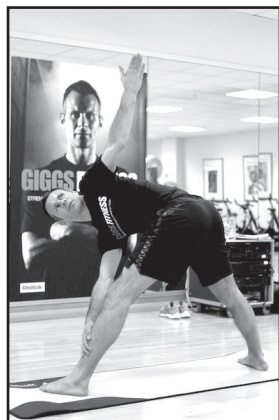


**Y**oga's image is overwhelmingly feminine. Yoga conjures up visions of beautiful women bending their bodies into impossible shapes to the gentle tinkle of temple bells. But this just in - men can do yoga too. And it will change your life.

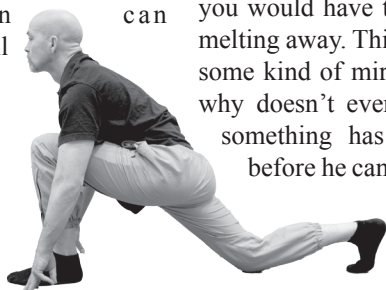
But to start learning yoga, a man needs to break through the blush barrier. Moving your body like that looks hard. The spiritual dimension of yoga appears intimidating. And because yoga has the image of quiet rooms full of lithe women bending over backwards, most men feel far too shy to take that first step. Yoga feels like it is not for them - not for us; it's too difficult, too girly, a fitness regime too far. But the few brave men who take up yoga find themselves falling in love, and wondering how they ever lived without it.

## Real Men Do Yoga

Even if you are a veteran of gyms and dojos, even if you have been playing for Manchester United for more than 20 years - Ryan Giggs is yoga's greatest male advocate in the UK - yoga is like nothing you have ever done. As Giggs has pointed out, most fitness regimes - weights, running, cycling - concentrate on strengthening one part of your body. In yoga, you use everything. After Giggs had his first lesson, he went home and slept for three hours. It's gentle but there is nothing soft about it; non-competitive, yet demanding. In America there is a 20-



Ryan Giggs has created a fitness DVD based on yoga



Because it is impossible to practise yoga without your mind becoming calmer, without your body becoming more flexible, without all the minor (and major) aches and pains that you thought you would have to live with forever just melting away. This all makes it sound like some kind of miracle cure. And it is! So why doesn't every man do it? Because something has to happen to a man before he can start learning yoga. It is no coincidence that the popular image of male yoga practitioners is of reformed wild boys like Colin Farrell and Russell Brand carrying their yoga mats to class - men who survived the outer limits of excess. Because before a man takes up yoga, something has to break.

It might be on some muddy Sunday morning football pitch (happens a lot), or on a ski slope, or sprinting in the park. But something snaps that you never dreamed would snap. And you understand that you are strong but you are not immortal, that you are fit but you are not unbreakable. And that is when yoga comes looking for you.

I broke one Saturday morning as I was running across the road. Not even running - just a slow jog to get out of the oncoming traffic, when suddenly my back went into these terrible muscle spasms, pulsing tremors of blinding pain, waves of agony running from the base of my spine to the back of neck. My back had been so strong and true for so long. I had never had a moment's pain in my back. And suddenly it felt like it would never stop hurting. The worst of it were these muscle spasms - the sign, I later learned, that the body knows it is hurt and is trying to protect itself.

So I tried everything. Doctors. Physiotherapy. Deep-tissue massage. Three different osteopaths. And as the excruciating weeks dragged by, I found the only thing that really helped my back were certain exercises I picked up along the highway of pain. An osteopath showed me one where you turn your body into an inverted V-shape, your tailbone in the air and your hands and feet flat on the ground. A deep-tissue therapist showed me another where you get down on all fours and stretch your body like a cat. Another osteopath showed



me how to release tension from my neck and my spine.

These exercises all had funny names. Downward-facing dog. Cat stretch. Cobra. The bridge. And I stuck with them because they helped. The terrible spasms stopped. I could reverse a car again. I could put on a pair of socks without assistance. And I realised that these simple little movements that had released me from a world of pain all had one thing in common. They all came from yoga.

Ryan Giggs turns 40 in 2013. "Yoga has definitely helped me," Giggs told *La Gazzetta Dello Sport*. "It helps me train every day because it gives me the flexibility and the strength not only to play the game, but to train as well." Many people take up yoga because they want to be free of pain and injury (with Giggs it was persistent problems with his hamstrings). They continue doing it because yoga has the power to stop the clocks. Pushing 40, Giggs is still running past defenders who are young enough to be his son. Thanks to yoga. Giggs eloquently refutes any suggestion that yoga is for sissy boys.

"The general concept of yoga is meditating; nice, easy stretches," he says. "That couldn't be further from the truth. Yoga is the hardest thing I've ever done. You are using muscles you're not used to stretching. Waking muscles up. And it's hard. You need to concentrate." At the far end of his thirties, Giggs still looks like a young footballer.

## It Keeps You Alive

The true glory of yoga is that it can be whatever you want it to be. It can heal your pain, it can help you sleep or it can get you closer to God. You don't get that with Zumba. There are three ages of physical exercise. First you do it for fun (kicking a ball about with your mates). Then you do it for fitness (wanting to make the most of what God gave you). And finally you do it to stay alive (wanting to watch your kids grow up). Yoga incorporates all three ages. It is fun even when you are doing it, feeling all those stiff and tired muscles waking up. It gets you fitter than you have ever been - making you even better at all the hard, heavy-impact things men enjoy like running and hitting things very, very hard. And it keeps you alive.



**Giggs on the pitch**

Tramping across fields with my dog, Stan, we happened upon a young woman in a meadow doing the sun salutation just as the sun was coming up. The sun salutation is a choreographed series of yoga movements, the kind of thing that is familiar to anyone who ever learned karate kata, tai chi or how to dance. Some martial arts are full of this stuff. In yoga there is only the sun salutation. It's just 12 moves, but books have been written about it. Some experts will tell you that this is all the yoga you will need. And watching that girl I had a dream that my fellow men will discover the life-healing benefits of yoga.

I dreamed that men would look at the likes of Colin Farrell and Russell Brand using yoga's shining path to lead them to health and happiness and wonder what it is all about. I dreamed that Giggs will do for yoga exactly what Wayne Rooney did for hair transplants - remove the fear factor, take away the shame, and set all men free to follow his example. But I know it is just a crazy dream. Having hair taken from one part of your head and surgically transplanted to a more barren part of your scalp - where's the shame in that? But embracing a 5,000-year-old physical discipline that can heal pretty much whatever ails you have, from a bad back to a torn hamstring to a jaded soul - are you kidding? Doing something that stops the pain? Now that's embarrassing.

*Originally published in the March 2013 issue of British GQ. Tony Parsons © The Condé Nast Publications Ltd.*

## Spotlight on the Spirit

# Suddenly Feeling Free

*Prisoners have been writing to the PPT about their powerful spiritual experiences for a long time. In fact, it was their accounts and letters which led Ann Wetherall to set up the Prison Phoenix Trust in 1988 to support prisoners in their meditation practice. To help mark our 25th anniversary year, we're reprinting here one of those early letters, with kind permission from the Alistair Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, with whom Ann originally worked.*

**I**n 1971 I was 27 years old and of no religious belief. A psychiatrist conducted group sessions in the penitentiary which I attended. About July 1971 he introduced a group of us to Swami, a Hindu saint. The Swami said that the practice of meditation allowed the three states of consciousness to work together, that if we practised the meditation for five minutes each day, in nine days we would see changes in ourselves and in 21 days others would see changes in us. All we had to do was sit upright in a chair or cross-legged with our head, neck and chest in a straight line and close our eyes. We were to tell our body to relax and just observe our thoughts and emotions, making no judgements, just letting everything go by like watching a movie.

I was skeptical and resistant to the Swami. He answered me by saying that "I love you, not the body, but that which is beyond you." He just pointed to a point beyond me. I couldn't say anything back to him, I was flabbergasted, silenced by his simple manner of relating to me.

### Sheer Joy

I practised sitting twice a day in meditation for lack of anything else to do. I wasn't convinced that it would change me, but thought I'd give it a try. Nothing seemed to happen at first, but after two weeks I noticed that I had stopped biting my finger nails. That encouraged me - I felt less tense. About a month after beginning meditation I was sitting in my cell meditating when I realised I had lost consciousness for a period of time. I

became aware of a rush of feeling rising up from the centre of my body towards my head. It was ecstasy, sheer joy - a wonderful feeling that all was well and that everything was going to be alright. I started laughing out loud about the idea that I was in jail. Suddenly I felt free. The other inmates thought I was going crazy!

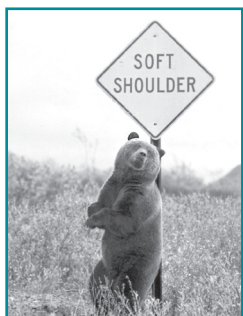
For a few days after that experience I walked around the penitentiary in bliss. I sensed another part of myself looking over my shoulder as I went about my daily activities in jail. Prior to this bliss state, I had constantly thought of using drugs again. But the craving had left me almost completely. Every now and then the thought came back, yet with no force to it. I don't act on the thought any more.

I was released in February of 1972 and didn't return to drugs or crime. My attitude to life has become positive, and my attitude towards religion has also changed. After the experience I began to read various spiritual material - the Bible, the Bhagavad-Gita and books on yoga and other related subjects. Prayer became meaningful to me for the first time in my life. I know that God exists though I can't define just what God is, only that somehow a greater power is present in my life. I have recently married and work as a counsellor to others who have had drug problems. I attend different church services from time to time and still continue with the meditation practice. Presently I handle problems without getting into emotional difficulties and continue to lead a relaxed life. I still have ups and downs, but without the unsettling emotional conflict I had in the past.



**M**any of you said you would like to use your creativity, by letting us frame your artwork - in the form of decorated envelopes - to help raise awareness of the PPT among the general public. To celebrate our 25th anniversary, we're making framed envelopes from prison available to friends and supporters for a suggested donation of £30. Each original envelope is mounted in a special frame that can be free standing or hung on a wall. On our website you can see the choices and find out how to order.

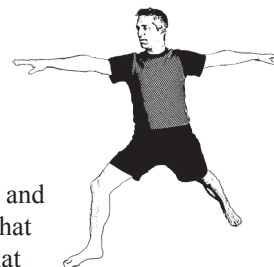
We're always on the lookout for more artwork, so do drop us a line, in your own decorated envelope!



# Past Tense

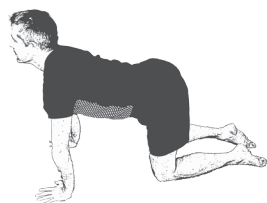
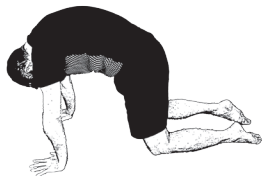


By Sally



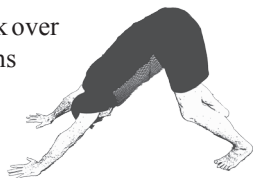
**W**e hold a lot of tension in our necks, shoulders and spines.

This can cause us to feel down and sluggish. Next time you feel this way, try these movements. They should ease out your shoulders, stretch your spine and make you feel more positive and energised.



**1** Start on your hands and knees. Breathing out, slowly arch the back upwards and tuck your chin into your chest. Breathing in slowly reverse the movement, lifting the head and tailbone, allowing the belly to drop down. Move slowly with the breath between these two positions, 10 times.

**2** Next, push your body weight back over your feet straightening your arms and legs. Try and get your heels as close to the floor as you can, with your back as flat as possible, like a ski slope. Stay here for 10 slow breaths.



**3** Now bend your knees, walk your hands back towards your feet and slowly uncurl, straightening your legs until you are standing up. As you breathe in slowly, raise your arms above your head, really stretching for the sky. Breathe out slowly as you lower your arms. Do this three times with the breath and then three more times, coming up on your toes.

**4** Next, spread your legs wide and bend your front knee. Check that your feet are far enough apart, so that your knee doesn't overshoot your foot. Keep your head up and your shoulders down. Hold the pose, feeling calm and strong as you breathe in and out 5 – 10 times. Then switch the feet around and do the same on the other side.

**5** Your arms hang at your sides as you make big slow circles with your shoulders. Breathe in as the shoulders roll up, and out as they roll down. After 10 times, circle the shoulders in the other direction, still working slowly with the breath.



**6** For this posture, keep your back as straight as you can with your head in line with your spine. Gradually come forward from the hips raising your arms towards the ceiling. Bring your head towards your legs and really enjoy the stretch as your arms come up and over.



To finish, take a deep breath and let it go, shaking out your arms and shoulders. You are now in a good state to sit upright on the edge of your bed, feet flat on the floor, and simply enjoy focussing on your natural breath for 5 – 10 minutes, or longer, letting go of everything, free in the shoulders, free in your heart.

“As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world as in being able to remake ourselves.”

~ Mahatma Ghandi, non-violent activist, 1869 - 1949

*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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**PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF**  
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