



25
years

Newsletter, Summer 2013



GOING FOR BROKE

Fixing his shed last year, a friend fell off his ladder and broke his arm. It was a bad break and he had to have surgery on it. I hadn't noticed that his forearm was a little wonky until he pointed it out to me. "It aches a little bit in damp weather, but it's actually stronger than before it was broken."

It often happens that when something is broken, the repair job leads to it being more useful, more beautiful, or stronger. In Japan, people tend to value things which have been through the mill, are a bit cracked, not complete or a little off centre, but which are even more beautiful as a result. The phrase in Japanese for beauty and imperfection being together in an object is *wabi sabi*. It's often used to talk about a piece of art or pottery, but it points to something in us human beings too.

More Whole Than Ever

On page 2 for example, a prisoner says she was a broken woman when she went to prison. You'll see from her letter that she took her experience of being at rock bottom and made it into something she now treasures. It's clear she's making all she can of her life and she's grateful for everything that happens, even being in a state of dark desperation. Lisa and many other friends in prison say how they still have doubt, or their mind is "quite nuts," but despite – or maybe because of – being broken, they feel more whole than ever.

But it's not easy to feel whole. We can't do it just by thinking about it. If we really see the mess our lives sometimes become and the things about our behaviour or thoughts that we'd rather

be different, it can be hard. Really hard! It might seem impossible that we could ever learn to like or value something in ourselves that seems so broken.



Standing strong in HMY Wymott

One of the best things about doing yoga and meditation each day is that just by breathing and being with how you are right here and now, and continually bringing the mind back from its trips, concepts and fantasies into the present – back to what is happening right now, you can start to accept difficult things about yourself. You can also begin to see that they aren't always there, and that you don't have to identify with them as "you." Over time, that gives a big sense of ease and of relief.

You can then see the *wabi sabi* in yourself. You can know the perfection and beauty that is right here in you – that is you! – even with the cracks, the things you'd rather have done differently, the personality that is uniquely yours. All around, people, things, situations are the same: flawed, broken, changing, incomplete. And beautiful and perfect at the same time.



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

“God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength.”

~ Vance Havner 1901 - 1986



ABOUT THE PRISON PHOENIX TRUST

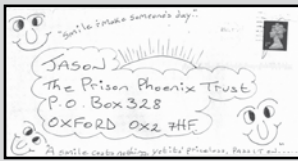
The Prison Phoenix Trust supports prisoners in their spiritual lives through meditation, yoga, silence and the breath. It recommends breath-focussed stretches and meditation sensitively tailored to students' needs. This safe practice offers students ultimate peace of mind. The PPT encourages prisoners and prison staff through correspondence, books, CDs, newsletters, free taster workshops and weekly classes.



Contents

Page 2-3	Prisoners' Letters
Page 2	Meditation Corner
Page 4	Releasing Breath
Page 5	When I Meditate
Page 6	Roots of the PPT
Page 7	Finding a Direction
Page 8	Saluting the Sun

1,001 Letters



By Jason

Earlier today the postman dropped off our mail. Reading letters from prisoners all over the UK and Ireland (and a few from further afield) is a joy that has remained unchanged at the PPT since it began 25 years ago. But today is rather special: I wrote my 1,001st letter. It has taken 17 years of correspondence with many people in prison. This is only a fraction of the letters we receive and write, as there are numerous volunteers in touch with prisoners.

What is it that draws so many people to sit quietly in the midst of the noise, anger and uncertainty of prison? Many say it is a way of reducing the huge inner stress that builds and threatens to erupt. Just recognising stress and anger is a breakthrough, and when the mind is observed we can see these emotions rise and fall away again.

Some want to understand how their mind works. Sitting still, observing the constant movements of thoughts starts to show that nothing remains the same. This can be hard to accept, and much of our correspondence is about living in a world that constantly changes.

When the body is upright and settled, and the breath even and silent, a clarity starts to emerge. Instead of being alone and isolated, it starts to become clear that everyone is in the same boat. Life can be tough for everyone, and no one is immune to this truth. Just sitting still, focussing upon the breath, a tolerance develops to those around us, and a feeling not to add to others' burdens. This is when the practice comes alive, practical and of benefit to everyone.

Getting along with your cell-mate, helping others to read and write, sharing cigarettes, putting up with the radio from the cell next door. Just accepting and not rejecting. These and thousands of other small acts of kindness that you tell us about in your letters flow naturally from a mind free from anxiety.



From HMP Preston



Doing yoga and meditation has made it easier to get to sleep at night, plus I feel a lot better about myself and my surroundings. I can't change the fact I'm in prison but I can change how I handle being in here.

This is my first time in prison. I'm quite a nervous person to begin with, and I came with all these bad ideas of what it was going to be like. When I'd been here for about two weeks, one of the lads gave me a book called *Becoming Free through Meditation and Yoga*. I never thought I would be interested in yoga or meditation but I've found this book helpful, especially when I had to go to hospital with an endoscopy.

I just wish I'd found out about yoga a long time ago. It would have saved me a lot of stress.

From HMP Send



Before coming to prison I had never meditated. But I was a broken woman when I began the RAPT programme and willing to give anything a try, and it helped a lot. Since leaving RAPT my meditation practice has taken off and I make time most mornings to meditate. It's made a huge difference to my wellbeing and sense of peace. My washing machine head of negativity has almost vanished and, a day at a time, I like happily enjoying the moment, or at least making the most of it.

Meditation ties in perfectly with the 12 step programme. I work on a daily basis with a sponsor. Step 11 is "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand him, praying only

Prisoners'

for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out." The more meditation I do the more benefits I seem to feel. Before coming to prison I had "no time" to develop an interest in meditation. I liked the idea of it, but would struggle to believe in its true benefits. If someone had described to me how I have described to you how meditation has helped me make such huge changes within my thoughts and feelings, I would have said, "Yeah, that's great for you: you must be a bit of a fruit loop!" Now I, the chronically hopeless, spiritually broken junkie, says, "Try meditation: it really works for me."

I still have that negative voice, my addict, who can creep in and tell me, "You're a fruit loop now. Look at you trying to meditate, you fool!" So it's good to read about other people's experiences and the benefits that meditation practice is bringing to them.

During treatment on RAPT I was struggling with "coming to believe in a higher power" and I came across one of Bo Lozoff's books in the library. It helped me find my higher power as I found organised religion difficult to accept. However I felt there was something, a power much greater than me, and reading Bo's book really helped me accept that living a spiritually based life was nothing to do with religion – especially the strict religion of my childhood.

I feel so much better and at peace with the universe and grateful (I was very ungrateful this time last year) for all the wonderful things I've been given in my life. Not just the obvious like my wonderful children and the good things, but also the dark desperation that brought



"My washing machine head of negativity has almost vanished..."

Letters



me to prison, and my prison sentence. That's all a part of what brought me to today – if it hadn't happened, I'd still be locked down by addiction, losing every precious thing in my life and hating myself for it. If I'd have survived much longer, it would have been survival, not living. I've still got a long way to go, but my journey's begun.

I heard a brilliant saying in one of the fellowship meetings here at Send. "Religion is for those who don't want to go to hell. Spirituality is for those who've been there!"

From HMP Rye Hill



Recently I have felt upset because of visits as my wife missed a couple. Then there was an issue with taxis, so instead of getting two hours on our visit, we only got 45 minutes. Hopefully the visit this Tuesday will be the full two hours and everything will go to plan.

I have found three people outside prison to help me get a good support network going. One has replied so far which is good. I want to write loads so I don't feel so lonely. Writing to yourselves and the Samaritans helps a lot too.

I had an altercation on the phone with my probation officer this week. He didn't seem interested in anything I had to say and wouldn't answer my questions, so I got angry and called him a few names. He hung up on me and has banned me from telephoning him. Even though I shouldn't have voiced my feelings towards him, it helped me get my anger and frustration out and I felt a lot better after it, so it wasn't all bad.

Sometimes I can't see when anger rises. If I'm really wound up I get a weird feeling in my head that feels like I'm going to go off on one. My body feels like it takes over my mind. Until recently I was never able to control that feeling. The two times it has happened over the past month I have recognised it and quickly moved from the situation before I flipped. The second time I went back to the cell and tried meditation to calm down and clear my mind, and it worked excellently.

I didn't think it would as I was so wound up and angry, but it worked so well an officer came up to me and said he noticed a change in that I normally would have become very verbally aggressive, but when I left my cell after meditation it was like nothing had happened and I'd moved

on from the incident. I was pleased I was able to do that.

That was the first time I have properly controlled the anger when it's been really bad, so I hope to carry this on and use it a lot more.

The idea you gave me before about meditating when I'm hungry so I'm not focussing on food has helped three times over the last week. I have had no food in the cell, and a few times in the evening have felt really hungry so I used meditation and after a while I was solely focussing on my breath and forgot about the food, so thank you. I'm already losing weight.

From HMYOI Polmont



Recently we convinced a few new people to try out the yoga class here and boy, did they have a workout! It's safe to say they enjoyed it. What I particularly enjoyed is that they left with a new satisfied perception, rather than this "girly" nonsense of yoga.

Yoga quickly helped me with my sleeping problems. And our yoga instructor Yvonne has helped dismantle the kaleidoscope of chaos in my life by making my stress more manageable. And by opening my mind to new and different concepts and ideas to life. I have never met someone so inspiring.

From HMP Woodhill



In the morning I do dog pose (breathe in) then to the cobra pose (breathe out), and repeat this ten times. I move on to the sun salutations. This wakes me up and helps me start each day with a positive attitude. At bang up I have a light lunch then sit for five minutes using a folded pillow in seiza. In the evening I sit on my chair, close my eyes and relax, breathe in and out. I clear my mind and tell myself, "Change is possible." This is just a small part of my routine and it is definitely working. If I had started this years ago I am 100% positive I would not be here now.

I am not so naïve as to think that I have completely changed, but change I have. It's going to be a long, hard process but with dedication and patience I'm sure

that I will become a better person. If I can do it anybody can. I found a saying in *We're All Doing Time* that really helps me: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

I no longer want to waste my energy and time on things that don't matter. I want to use that energy on more positive things.

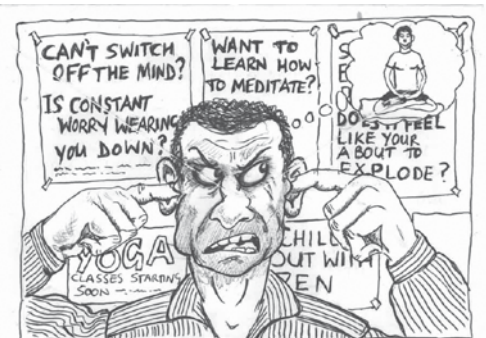
Your help and support really came into its own recently when another inmate attacked me. My first and usual reaction was to retaliate with violence, but I stopped, walked away and used some of the techniques that you've shown me to calm myself down. Other inmates and staff can't believe I haven't resorted to violence: I'm basically bigger and stronger than my attacker by quite a bit. I am determined not to turn to violence even though I am very angry with the attacker. In time I hope my anger will pass. You have helped me find a better person within myself.

From Klang Piset Prison, Thailand



Since I started practising yoga and meditation, gentleness and self-control have become automatic. It is the best thing I have learnt in prison. Why? Because it connects me with many things and human beings.

I know I am a different person entirely now. There are many reasons why God allowed this tragedy of coming into prison. One big one was to have more knowledge and wisdom about what I have never known since I was born. As a Christian, it is the perfect and best way to control the mind and soul. If you can control your mind, it will help your Spirit, which is the Spirit of God.



Cartoon from HMP Woodhill



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

Relaxing Breath



By Brent

Deep relaxed breathing is one of the

best ways to lower stress in the body. Breathing deeply sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. The brain then sends this message around your body. When you breathe deeply to relax your heart rate slows, blood pressure goes down, and you feel better inside. Like to try?

Even if you think this is too easy, or if you've 'done' deep breathing already, since every breath is unique, you've not really done this before. Not totally. So, let's go.

1. Start with a 'sigh'. You already know how to sigh because we all do it naturally. Sighing is a natural way we all release tension from the breathing rhythm.
2. Sigh again.
3. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Keep your shoulders relaxed. Your abdomen (belly) should expand, and your chest should rise only a little. You can place your hand on the abdomen to feel it expand.
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth. As you blow

air out, purse your lips slightly, but keep your jaw relaxed. You may hear a soft "whooshing" sound as you exhale.

5. Now, can you keep going for several minutes?

You can do this standing up, sitting down or lying down. Which do you prefer?

Continue taking even, deep breaths. Cats and new born babies naturally breath this way. Consider how you breathe when you first wake up in the morning or just before you fall asleep. When we breathe as if we are relaxed, we feel relaxed! Sounds easy, but it's not always this easy in practice so be patient with yourself. Remember to take breaks if you need to. If it makes you feel out of breath you should definitely take a break. You can do this a little, or a lot. Can you let your breath get very light and soft?

Breathing as if we are asleep can help us feel less tense, less anxious and much more relaxed. If it's bedtime, you might like to drift towards sleep, or you can use this calming breath to feel more comfortable within when you're awake. Let me know how you get on.



Switch On and Tune In!

We're chuffed to be one of the charities chosen for the BBC Radio

4 Appeal. In this powerful 3-minute radio slot, Erwin James will be letting 1.9 million listeners know about the PPT, and how they can donate. It's on Sunday 16th June at 7.55 am and 9.26 pm, and again on Thursday 20th at 3.27 pm.

Erwin started his 20 years in prison with no education, but took full advantage of what was on offer, educated himself and wound up writing a regular column for the Guardian newspaper while still locked up. In the radio appeal, he talks about the intense mental pressure prisoners face and the role yoga and meditation played in helping him find peace and space for reflection.

Why not tune in to Radio 4 and support Erwin and the PPT, just by listening and knowing you're part of it? We'd be pleased if you'd help spread the word ahead of June 16th too. If you're on the out and have internet access, you can hear an 8-minute

unscripted clip of Erwin talking in depth about his experience in prison, the power of yoga and meditation, and the role of his yoga teacher Andrew in HMP Nottingham. It's on our website and well worth a listen.



Christmas in June?

Crazy to be thinking about Christmas this time of year! But this is our only chance to let you know that we're taking entries for our Christmas card contest. The winner will have the design printed into cards and sold in support of the Trust, and receive 60 cards to send or give away. Send us your winter celebration or Christmas-y paintings or drawings by 16th July. You don't have to be Pablo Picasso! We prefer original designs in colour, on plain unlined paper, but black and white is okay too. Happy sketching and painting!

Life on Release

Facing the Finish Line

From a friend

I still have nineteen days left to serve, but here I am, looking at the finish line. When I first started my sentence, I thought 2013 would never come. It was back in 2010 that I knew I had to make changes. It wasn't the rest of the world that was at fault, it was me. I embarked on a journey into the world of yoga, silence and meditation, and of course, the power of God.

This journey has been one of self discovery, it has been brilliant and at times truly magical. Yoga has carried me through some of the hardest moments I think any man or woman could bear. It has given me inner strength and the ability to control emotions that at one time wreaked havoc.

I still have moments where my emotions almost get the better of me. Then, from absolutely nowhere and totally unrehearsed, another voice kicks in and simmers me down almost instantly. I am so glad that I started this wonderful journey through yoga. It is a journey that does not stop when I cross the finish line and get released. The prison sentence was just a stepping stone into a better way of life. Without it, I wouldn't have found the beautiful power of yoga or the peace of mind that now resides within me.



BBC
RADIO





What I Do When I Meditate

From Rowanbank Clinic

If I don't meditate every day I can end up like a headless chicken. My activity motor gets heated up and I've just got to slow down. Meditation does this for me. It also brings calm and helps me see more clearly.

If I'm stressed or worried or troubled, or if I have lost my cool at some point that day, I close my eyes and begin to focus on the breath and I become aware of how I breathe and how I am feeling.

Sometimes it can be difficult if there's a lot of internal stuff going on. Different emotions, memories, thoughts and sensations pass through my consciousness, some pleasant, some not so pleasant. It doesn't matter which, in fact at times I actually feel happy with the more difficult ones because in spite of their discomfort they don't move me: I have power over them. I know it makes me stronger and tougher to face the challenges of life.

Thoughts are Just Thoughts

Even if I meditate for half an hour and all that has gone through my mind is

something someone said to me that upset me, I know it is good that I am willing to allow myself to let this happen as it's all a teaching and usually there's a solution coming through.

After nearly two years doing a little meditation I now have a regular practice. Tonight I meditated on the notion of thoughts being just thoughts and not the same thing as reality. I pondered this a while and when I came out of my period of meditation I thought about how it can be difficult to see this as much of the framework of what we experience as reality is based on our thoughts and mindsets. I do believe in higher realities but these can only be experienced when we are more at one with ourselves or "coming home".

Peace is a Free Gift

I sometimes think of how far out of tune I was with the love and happiness God wanted me to have and now, after all those years of looking here, there and everywhere I find that peace and happiness needn't have been so hard to find, that it is a free gift made available to all who would receive it. It's not

contingent on me being a good boy and doing all the right things and if I'm a "bad" boy and do all the "wrong" things, my free gift isn't going to be taken away.

God is not a Santa Claus who only gives to good little boys and not to bad little boys. His love is unconditional for everyone.

Birthday Party at Grendon!



The PPT has been working with prisoners since 1988, and to celebrate our 25th year, we're holding a fund-raising evening at HMP Grendon on Thursday 11th July. The main event is award winning actor and our Patron, Jeremy Irons, delighting guests with dramatic readings. We also can't wait to hear Grendon prisoners play a piece they will have been working on with jazz greats Andy Sheppard (sax) and Kuljit Bhamra (percussion). The audience will later listen to Andy and Kuljit play a set of their soulful sound. Supper is included, as well as an auction by BBC auctioneer Charlie Ross. Tickets are £60. Get in touch if you'd like to come.

The Madness Of My Mind

From HMP The Mount

It's been a while since I wrote but I've been practicing a lot. The printout you sent me was interesting to read. I can relate to what Reg Wilson said about his body feeling poisoned. There was a time when anger felt like hot curry powder in my joints and flowing around my veins. It felt like I was poisoned, like my mind was destroying my body and in return my pain infested body was destroying my mind. Standing up straight and relaxing my shoulders was impossible, it was too painful.

My mind would torment and torture me from the exact nanosecond I woke up until late at night, laying in bed trying to sleep. Without heavy duty drugs, insomnia was a way of life.

Things seem so different now. I have learnt to relax and chill out and to observe and be conscious. I am learning that my mind is actually quite

nuts and can affect my body in very negative ways. I have become aware of an "observer". This seeming separation of my mind and an observer was a key turning point. Now I know I don't have to buy into the madness of my mind, there is something behind it. Although I feel I can't describe this something but whatever it is, I'm grateful it's there.

Anger Like a Tidal Wave

I do still find it hard to get in touch with my feelings sometimes. My gut tells me sadness is something I have a lot of. Today after my morning sitting I stopped and thought about myself and how I feel about myself. My awareness shot to the memory of me as a little boy, and I felt a cocktail of sadness, feeling sorry for and kindness or maybe compassion, for this little boy, who I realise is still within me.

Sometimes I feel a vast space down inside my body that is so still.

Anger can come back like a tidal wave and if I'm quick I observe it and the flames die very quickly and I feel like I've grown or maybe changed. This is so empowering.

My friend and I were in the yard yesterday and he said, "Be thankful for what we are learning, be thankful for being you." I'm going to miss my friend when he goes out next week. He is going out with no licence after many years. I am excited for him. I am also excited about me going out with no license in 11 months as well, but the future doesn't exist and the moment is what it is!! I can't help but hope though, for a girlfriend, college and Southend beach.



Artist Salvador Dali



Ann's Big Idea

By Geoff Hammond



In November 1985 I was in HMP Leicester waiting for allocation when I came across an article in a Christian magazine asking for people to write in with their spiritual experiences, particularly out of body experiences and others which were profound or life changing. Having had many such experiences, I wrote my letter and quickly got a reply.

The article was written by Ann Wetherall. She said that she was working for an organisation researching general spiritual experiences, but she was extremely interested in spiritual experiences from people in prison. A few weeks later I sat across a table and listened to the ideas that Ann had of setting up some sort of a network whereby prisoners could share their experiences in a forum, a society or magazine. We hit it off immediately.

After a number of visits, Ann's idea started to take shape. She wanted me to contact other prisoners so that she could start writing them letters. Her enthusiasm was boundless, I had to keep slowing her down. I told her the best way forward would be to secure a meeting with the Chaplain General, which she did, receiving much support. She gave me a copy of Bo Lozoff's *We're All Doing Time*. It was her one and only copy but she said she would write off for some more. She believed that Bo's book could be used as a valuable tool to reach out to people in prison to let them know that they were not alone.

Good Luck... You'll Need It!

As the weeks drifted by with more visits and letters, Ann told me that she had received a letter from another prisoner from Scotland, and then one from Manchester, and then another and another. She was delighted. She told me that she was planning to give up



Geoff and Jane

her research job and to concentrate on prison work. She had cleared a space in the garage to set up her little office.

I moved to HMP Maidstone in Spring 1986, and although we continued to write, I declined visits because it was too far for her to travel. During the Autumn of 1986 our letters stopped and we both went on our separate ways.

I remember thinking at the time, "I wish you luck Ann, you'll need it." I felt that this gentle but quite determined woman would soldier on for a few years more until eventually the great penal machine, (which us prisoners call The System), would work away at her spirit and dampen her enthusiasm. I thought the idea would run for a while like a candle in a dark cell, giving light and warmth for a while before flickering to nothing.

I was released in 1993, when I worked closely with Franciscan brothers in London. Much has happened since then. I am now the residential Warden for Aylesbury Quakers where I live with Jane, my wife and spiritual soul mate, doing what little we can to make the world a better place.

A few months ago, I was one of three speakers giving talks about prisons at a Quaker centre when my friend and line manager (who happens to be a retired Prison Governor) introduced me to Ann Wetherall's sister and another supporter of the Prison Phoenix Trust. I was blown away and left speechless when I was told that Ann's Ashram Project had survived, had been renamed The Prison Phoenix Trust and was alive and flourishing in virtually every prison in the country! I had no idea it had survived. The spiritual shivers ran up my spine and exploded with joy in the very depths of me.

Ann, you beautiful person. I am so sorry I doubted you.

Editor: When Ann met Geoff (see opposite) she was working with the Religious Experience Research Centre, set up by Sir Alister Hardy. This centre gathers and archives accounts of religious experience and publishes research in this area. Ann and the others wondered if people in prison might have more of these experiences, since being locked up can make you feel without hope, and that there is little help around.

After putting articles in prison newspapers and literature, the Centre started hearing from prisoners. Many said that they had never told anyone, because they worried people might think they were mad!

Ann was deeply moved by the responses. She wanted to stay in touch with the prisoners who had written, learn from them, and do something – she wasn't quite sure what – to help spirituality in prison flourish. This was more than was the Centre was set up to do, so Ann set off on her own.

Soon, she was building on her vision of people in prison using their cells as places of spiritual growth, speaking of the parallels of prisoners with monks and nuns, whose rooms are often called "cells." In 1988, Ann and a group of friends registered as a charity, continuing to write letters to prisoners from a room in her home, but now with a form that would allow the Trust to grow.

Twenty-five years after she set it up, the Prison Phoenix Trust is in touch with more than 5700 prisoners each year, sends out over 10,000 newsletters each quarter, supports 140 weekly prison yoga and meditation classes, and is working not only in prisons in England and Wales, but also Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Ireland. The work has grown tremendously, perhaps more than Ann could have ever imagined when she died in 1992. But her vision of prison cells as places of spiritual growth remains at its heart.

In 1988, when the PPT was founded...

- Beetlejuice, Who Framed Roger Rabbit and Die Hard were released.
- Margaret Thatcher had been Prime Minister for nine years.
- Kylie Minogue was the highest selling music artist, and Locomotion was her most popular song and the highest selling single of the 80's.
- The average price of a house in Britain was £60,000 (today it is £238,000).
- Mulletts were in fashion.



Ann Wetherall, a believer in the strength of the human spirit.





Finding My Direction

From HMP Holloway



Iwake up and still can't believe that I am in a category A prison! But I don't feel sorry for myself. I shed far too many tears already, tears of shock and frustration.

This is week six, day two. I asked for a prayer mat, a scarf to cover my head, a Tesbi – akin to a rosary – to help me count the 100 names for Allah and I asked for the direction East so I know which way to face when I pray. So far, no one has provided anything. I still don't know which way East is.

I am an Indian Muslim. We are a tiny worldwide community. We integrate, participate, but keep our heads down. We certainly rarely end up in trouble or in prison. Born poor and brought up on a council estate, I grew up with little. When we came as refugees to England, there were no mosques and hardly a community or opportunity.

I can use how my parents managed then to manage now in prison. I guess a direction. A clean sheet laid on my disinfected bed is a sufficient prayer mat. My woollen scarf, washed and cleaned, serves its purpose. I can count to 100 on my fingers. I sing the Arabic surats and sayings. I flex up and down, not dissimilar to my yoga moves. I guess the times for prayers. Twenty hours in a cell allows one time to contemplate.

Each day I wake up and thank the higher power for making me blessed. I am not sure I believe in the concept of God, but I liked growing up celebrating Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism and even aspects of Judaism as well as Islam. Indian Muslims worship as a family. Every occasion is marked with a wonderful meal. Even the simple funeral meal of dhal and rice following a rice pudding starter tastes fantastic when shared with over 200 people. So prison food is manageable.

As I flex, bend, rise and fall, as my mind fills with wonderful words proclaiming a greater power and spiritual being, I am thrown away from my woes and misery. The lessons and past experience which taught me gratitude and humility help me overcome the hunger pangs and the cold wind blowing through the windows. I am learning to quell and ignore the noise, the banging



The Holy Mosque in Mecca, in 1910

and shouting, the abuse, name-calling and bullying. I have stopped asking why I am here. I AM HERE.

I thought I would be intolerant, judgemental even. Every woman has a story, a reason, we all know the abused become the abusers. Those who never had guidance, opportunity or love alongside sexual/physical/drug/alcohol abuse were always susceptible. I blame no one nor do I pity anyone – what right do I have?

Communal Celebration

So I pray, I meditate, I manage. Without a prayer mat or a covered head, but I manage. I cry less and I try to smile, to greet and be polite. I make sure I go out every day, swim when I can (yes, Holloway has a pool) and be creative with pottery, academia, discussions, music and textiles.

I find my own way to meditate, to chant, to breathe fresh air, to be decent and human.

I am learning that details do not matter. What is important is finding peace, purpose and doing whatever stops depression. I found solace in Islam and prayers.

What I like about being an Indian Muslim is that we communally celebrate everything. I remember when we lost

a young brother, Nuneddin, to cancer. Macmillan offered bereavement counselling, and when the counsellor came to meet the family and saw us receiving food for 40 days cooked by the community, saw the community taking care of everything, women talking, sharing, crying, laughing, eating and generally supporting each other – the counsellor said we as a community had more than anything he could offer us.

The way I was brought up, respect and good behaviour were very important. Children are taught the etiquette of what we consider 'good behaviour' and the value of silence. In Mosque we often sit and listen, pray and are silent except for the person leading the prayers. However the evening always ends with food and noise. Women sit with their friends, men the same and children also separate in friendship groups. There is chatter over food shared on one communal plate.

We always pray in classic, ancient Arabic. We know the general meanings, but one has to concentrate and empty one's mind during prayers. I find it extremely therapeutic as I just can't think (or work!) whilst I pray. I feel great and as if I have emptied my body of rubbish after praying.





Salute the Sun!



By Lucy

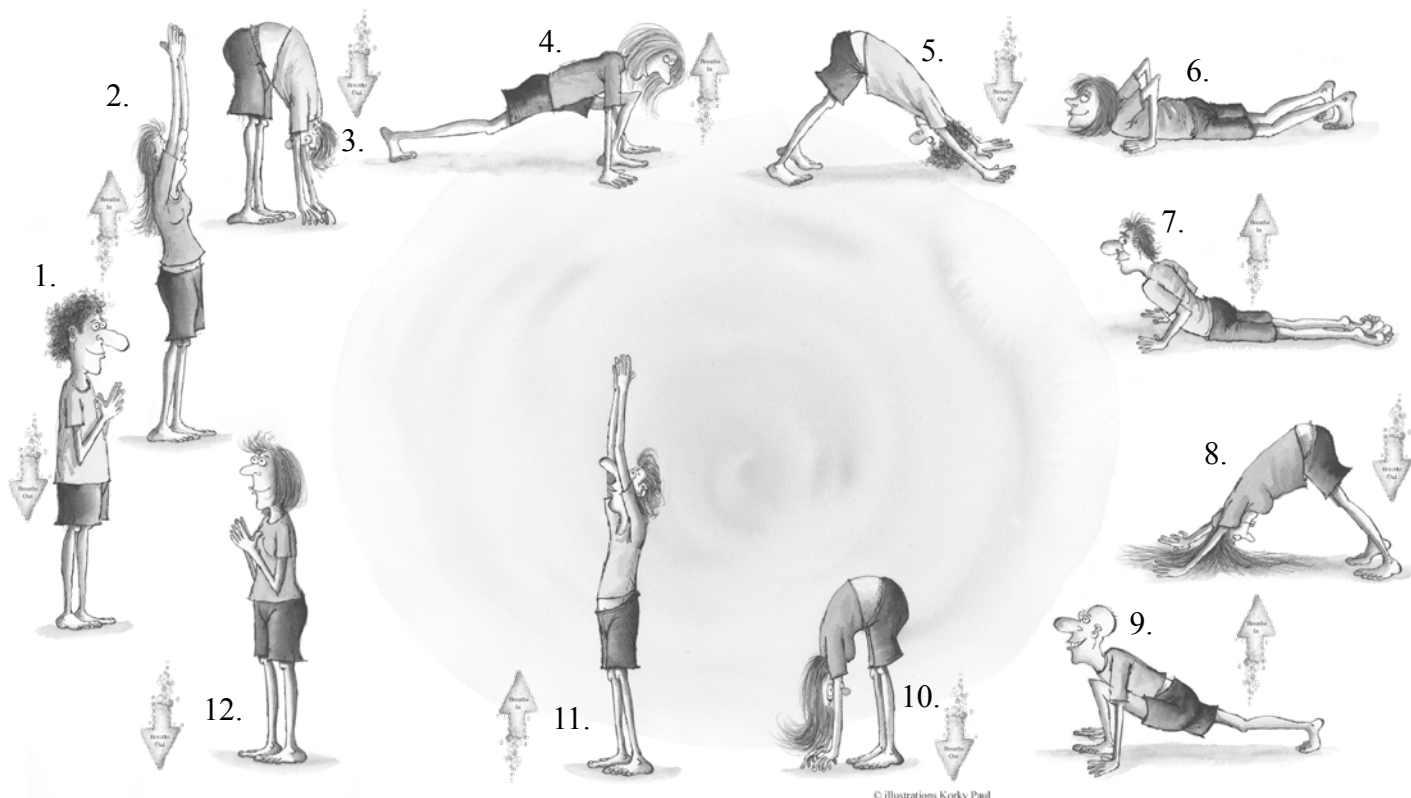


We all know that doing yoga is good for us, but it can be difficult to know where to start - what postures should you do today? What routine is best?

On days when you're not sure what to do, why not do some sun salutations? This is a simple yoga sequence designed to awaken and stretch out the body, especially in the morning. This is a good

cardio and strength building exercise, and will help you feel calm and focussed.

As you bend and stretch, following the pictures, breath deeply and slowly. If there's a down arrow next to the picture, breath out. If there's an up arrow, breath in. Move slowly and deliberately, in time with your breathing. Do this 5 or 10 times, or more. Enjoy, and have a great day!



“The secret of happiness is not in doing what one likes, but in liking what one has to do.”

~ James Barrie, Scottish author, 1860 - 1937

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

