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

www.theppt.org.uk

## Newsletter, Autumn 2014



ike, a friend who had been inside for many years was talking the other day about being clean and sober for many months after half a lifetime of addiction and madness. He told us how he had recently

managed warring voices in his heart while on a walk with a friend, who had suggested they finish at the pub. "Just one drink, go on...," said one voice. "That's a slippery slope mate!" said the other. Because of his self-awareness and willingness to step into what felt uncomfortable, Mike could speak to his friend and say the pub just wasn't a good idea. He had feared his friend might be upset. In fact, she understood completely. Then, speaking to us of the challenges that still face him as he moves on from his old life, he said, "The monkey may be off my back, but the circus is still in town."

Another friend in Haverigg prison says something similar on page 2. His self esteem has been boosted when he has been able to shrug the monkey of anger off his back, but he is still tested at times.

The circus will always be in town: we will always face challenges and new situations (or old situations, dressed up differently). There is no getting around this. We are like the doll in the story on page 7: used to feeling solid, and overwhelmed

when we meet the shifting, insecure sea.

It is clear that these two – and so many people who tell us about their meditation and yoga - are not shrinking from the circus. They are finding out who they really want to be. On page

> 2, our friend talks about being more aware of the "true me." Another friend writes what this actually feels like on page 5, "I'm really starting to get on with myself, so that's good."

> It isn't easy to know who we really are, to get on with ourselves. It's the most difficult relationship we'll ever have! But as it starts to happen, we may be able to cope with the unpredictable, overwhelming event that is our life with more choice and creativity. Oddly enough, cultivating silence and stillness allows us to cope with the noise and constant flux of our lives. Sitting still

as Jason suggests on page 3, you can let go of yourself as you focus on your breathing. And as the doll made of salt discovers when she lets go of herself more and more to the ocean, there

is unbelievable joy in seeing that your truest "me" is vaster than



Monkeying around after the Wandsworth yoga class in 2006. Classes have run in the prison since 1994.



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

#### 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.

## Never look down on anybody unless you're helping them up.

~ Jesse Jackson, American civil rights activist, b. 1941



you could ever have imagined.

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#### From HMP Haverigg

The voice in my head is not too kind to me sometimes. Previously

when my ego, or inner voice, would become critical of me or other people, I would just go along with it and feed it more and more strength. Now I am aware of what is going on and I know that this voice is not the true me. This does my self esteem the world of good.

I do find it hard sometimes. Today, a lad said something to me that was not too nice, but he was only joking and didn't mean anything bad by it. I found myself getting angry and my ego's voice kicked in and I acted off it, though not violently.

Normally I can just observe it and nip it in the bud, but sometimes I get angry and then show it unhealthily and then I always look back and give myself a hard time about it. I just wish I could let it be like water off a duck's back like some people can, but my ego tells me, "I need to deal with it because people will think I'm a pushover if I don't." Being placid is seen as just being weak and a mug in here. I know I should just calmly pull him to one side when no one's there and our egos aren't being threatened. I have tried this with the same lad but he keeps coming out with the same kind of comment in a couple of days.

I think he feels big saying things like this in front of people cos he is only small and I am pretty big with the weight training. He knows I'm a Buddhist and now believe in non-violence and he takes advantage of this. There have been loads of times when people will say things jokingly, but overstep

the mark. I don't bite, but because of that they push the boundary even further. Afterwards my ego will give me a really hard time – "Why didn't you say something?" "Everyone will think you're a coward now." "If he says it again, punch his head in."

I have changed so much, and really like the person I am now. There is a deeper me, who is not that ego and is kind, compassionate and cares about people rather than just bouncing around being reactive and getting into all the prison politics and not talking kindly of people. This makes me feel great about myself, something I have not had reason to for many years. My ego does give me a hard time sometimes, but things are becoming easier, for the first time in decades.

#### From HMP Coldingley

Thank you for helping me with my yoga studies. It's been a great



journey and the process has helped me greatly during the past few years. I have learned to exercise better and have also become a connoisseur of breathing techniques. I emphasised cardio and yoga breathing for a long time when I stopped smoking three years ago, and now my lungs are very strong. I'll be released soon, so this is goodbye for now. Thank you. Breathe freely.



#### From HMP Lewes

Thank you for the CD Clearing the Head, Relaxing the Body, and the book Freeing the Spirit, which I've been using two to four times a

# Join us for the PPT's 2014 Lecture! 'Faith & Identity Behind Bars: the role of spiritual traditions in prisoners' self-perception' The Rev'd Mike Kavanagh

The University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford Tuesday 11th November, 7-8.15 p.m. followed by refreshments be are pleased to invite a contract of the con

We are pleased to invite any friends who may be out of prison to hear **Rev'd**Mike Kavanagh deliver this year's Prison Phoenix Trust lecture. Mike heads the
Chaplaincy and Faith Services for prisons in England & Wales. He has studied
karate with his son and also learned Ashtanga Yoga. His lecture will explore how
spiritual practice affects our identity and ability to make clearer choices, including
those related to addiction; and how a community of practice can help sustain
payable to The Prison Phoenix Trust to PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF with the

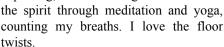
## Prisoners'

week.

Overall with doing gym and yoga I'm feeling a lot healthier than I was a year ago when I came into custody.

#### From HMP Highdown

Over the past few weeks I've been a bit stressed. My sentence is a bit longer than I was expecting, but I'm feeling



I'm really trying to get transferred to Brixton for rehabilitation and I would also like to study. I desperately want to change. I've been in prison previously but I'm tired of this lifestyle and I'm determined to put it all behind me and live a normal, active life. Yoga is such a positive practice and it unites people in such a good way.

I've been practising yoga a lot in my cell using the CD you sent me. I do it whenever my friend Louis lends me his CD player.

The sun was amazing today and for once they let us out for exercise so I got to get a few rays, but unfortunately there was a negative situation which took place out on the yard so our time was cut short. There's a lot of gangs here - young guys who haven't found out exactly who they are just yet. I'm fortunate that I'm a bit older and content with the person I am. I guess we all learn at a different pace.

Yoga is a great way to control negative thoughts and helping to release painful problems during stressful times.

I'm feeling the full shoulder stand. I love it. It's like its stretching the muscles in my lower back. I go to sleep better when I do it. I'm actually struggling with the cobbler pose as I'm 6'1" with long legs, but I'm getting there.



## From Rampton Hospital

Flicking through your book We're All Doing

Time in the segregation unit in 2010, I remember thinking to myself, "What could I possibly gain from meditation? It's boring and a waste of time." Anyway, a few years down the line and I'm here, meditating. Feeling at last a connection with my inner self. Nothing matters, I'm carefree, empty of worries and consumed by positive energy, content with who I am.

## Letters

I open my eyes into a world which before was dark and meaningless. Suddenly the dark shadows I have been consumed by for far too many years have faded away. I'm no longer trapped in a mental prison. I'm free.

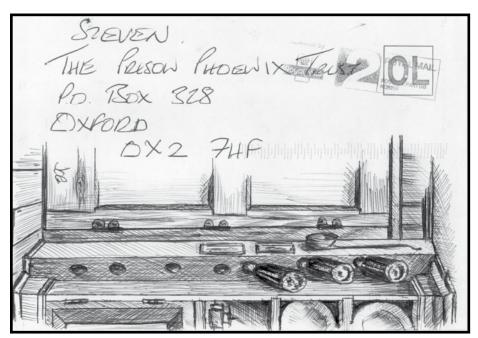
#### From HMP Risley

Thave now been here two months and have been surprised at how long it has taken me to acclimatise to a new prison.



I am still sharing a cell, which is disappointing, but hopefully it won't be too long before I have my own space to fully commit to the yoga. However things have moved forward in one respect.

I received my CD player that I saved up for and bought while in prison (because I have given up smoking - well done me!). This means I was able, albeit belatedly, to rip off the cellophane from your CD Clearing the Head, Relaxing the Body. It has been an absolute revelation! Although I am not yet able to do the yoga, the relaxation exercises, the breathing exercises and the meditation exercises are proving invaluable. I have been able to listen to them almost daily and it is quite remarkable the effect they have on my mood, temperament and state of mind.



An envelope from HMP Exeter

The instructions are simple to follow, the tone is reassuring and the people who deliver it have very calming voices.

I have even persuaded my pad mate (no new age follower of yoga/meditation, I assure you) to give it a whirl and we have had about half a dozen sessions in silence together doing the relaxation and meditation. On a couple of occasions he has even instigated those sessions himself! Because we are both British and of a certain age it can be a little awkward, but once we get over our straight laced

disposition we both get value out of lying in silence. He, like me, can talk for England, and therefore 40 minutes in silence and meditation from both of us is quite and achievement and very beneficial.

PPT letter writers are always happy to write to you about your yoga and meditation practice. Drop us a line!

## **Meditation Corner**

## Countdown!



By Jason

woke up late this morning: my second alarm finally woke me up, Lleaving only 30 minutes to dress, eat breakfast and get to work. I was getting increasingly flustered watching 9 am appear ever closer, and when I arrived a few minutes late that was annoying too. Not a brilliant start to the day... and all because of the numbers on the clock.

In prison, the clock governs every movement: Unlock at 08:00; back in cell at 14:00; unlock at 18:00; then back in

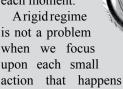


cell until 08:00 the next day. The length of your sentence is inescapable too, and even thoughts of parole get the clock counting down again. Is it possible to avoid having all we do dictated by time?

In order to stop analysing the clock, a good start is to sit upright, perfectly still and focus on the breathing - this allows the mind to settle and not dwell so much on thoughts, including thoughts about time. We can feel the air entering the nose, pause, and then start to exhale, gradually coming to a stop again: another natural cycle like day changing to night or the passing seasons. We cannot be certain when these activities started - or when they will end - and this allows the mind to settle.

Returning to the breath, the movement of the inhalation and exhalation becomes apparent. Each part of the cycle balances the other out and the timing is perfect. It becomes clear that perfect timing is the only requirement - and all we can really

do is respond to each moment.



throughout the day. We awake, open our eyes, yawn, stretch, feel refreshed or groggy depending on our sleep. All this happens naturally at the right time. The cell door opens (and my front door opens too) - it's time to emerge. Later we are hungry – it's time to eat, and at the end of the day we are tired. Time for sleep.

A clock can be useful with all the activities we fit into our lives. I arose at 8:30, but could not get to work by 9:00. So tomorrow I will get up earlier and see what happens. Whatever the outcome the timing is always perfect. How could it not

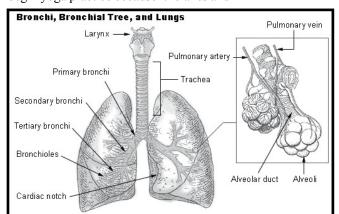
## **Three Part Breath**



For many years humans have breathed in different patterns to change how they feel. The three part breath teaches you to breathe fully and completely. When you breathe shallowly, the air only enters your upper chest and very little enters your lower chest. This means that not as much oxygen passes into the blood, and the waste gas carbon dioxide doesn't get as flushed out. This vital exchange of gases takes place where the business end of the lungs meets the blood: the alveoli, small sacs in the lungs (see diagram) with a total area of about 100 square metres.

Learning to breathe in a deep yet relaxed way will give you more energy whilst making you feel relaxed.

The three part breath is a good way to begin yoga practice because it relaxes and



focusses you. You can use it every day to change how you feel. Try it and see.

You can practice it in any comfortable position in which your spine is straight and your abdomen is not compressed. You can sit, lay down or stand.

Sigh three times and close your eyes. Relax your face and body, and breathe naturally through your nose. Then begin:

- . Place one hand on your lower abdomen, just below your belly button. Place the other hand on the edge of your rib cage. Relax your shoulders. Breathe in and out in a relaxed and natural way, feeling your belly rise and fall. Feel your breath as it moves in and out of your body through the nose.
  - Continue feeling your belly rising and falling. Now also feel your rib cage gently expanding as you breath in. As you breath out, feel your rib cage relax, then feel your belly deflate. Gently pull in your belly button to expel the air.

3. Next, bring one hand to the centre of your chest, just below your collarbone. As you inhale, breathe all the way into your belly, then your rib cage, then this area and allow your chest to rise slightly. Then, exhale and relax.

As you continue to breathe, keep your awareness on this three part movement. Does it feel like a gentle wave rolling up from the belly to the chest? As you inhale, your belly, ribs, and chest expand. As you exhale, chest, ribs and belly relax.

Continue at your own pace. Allow the three parts of the breath to flow smoothly without pausing. Relax into your own breathing rhythm.

Finally, remove your hands from your torso and continue following the three part breath with your mind's eye.

Continue for as long as you feel comfortable, or up to five minutes.

The three part breath is calming and soothing any time, but be careful never to force the breath or breathe too deeply. If your breath becomes strained or you start to feel dizzy or anxious, stop and let your normal breathing return. It's important for your lungs to feel comfortably full, but not strained. Let your breath be easy and smooth. Happy Breathing!

#### **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)	


Postcode

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

## **Christmas Cards**

A prisoner friend has designed this year's Christmas card (152 x 103mm). The inside message is from the author Hamilton Wright Mabie - "Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love." You can see it in colour on our website. To order, send the form to the left 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.



# **Opening Doors**

## From Leverndale Hospital

You say in your letter that I am genuine. Well I think that I'm not. Maybe you see in me something I don't see in myself. I think I am quite negative and self critical, but I am aware of that so at least that's something.

I was doing my meditation the other night when someone came to the door and disturbed me. I got back into it, but ten minutes later someone came to the door again. I found out something about myself and how much progress I have made because in the past if someone came to the door it annoyed me. Now it doesn't bother me at all.

I still practice my meditation – not as often as I should – but one thing I am learning is not to beat myself up about it if I don't do it. Another thing I'm learning is not to go buying all these books and CDs on meditation because, I'm not boasting or anything, but I think the books can't teach me any more.

I have read many letters about how people have been transformed through practices of yoga and meditation and I think, "Why hasn't that happened to me?" But maybe it has happened and I haven't noticed it. About my practice I think there is something happening there, I'm not sure but I'm going to observe and see what happens.

I have a lovely big room now and now I have enough space I'm hoping to get back to doing my tai chi class soon. There's a lot of things about to happen to me so I'm quite optimistic about my future.

You know you have really opened my eyes. What I've been trying to do is change myself when all I really needed to do was accept myself. I call that a revelation.

You mention to keep the practice simple and you are right: you do get tangled with complicating and elaborating things.

I'm on a journey – a spiritual journey – and I don't know where it will take me but I'm looking forward to it.

#### Fleeting feelings

I am really starting to get on with myself so that's good. I was feeling anxious the other day so I went to my room and did a bit of deep breathing and it really works.

I read something in a book that made me realise I was doing something wrong with my practice. It says I shouldn't develop concentration to the point of excluding all else except the breath – the purpose of it

is to notice the workings of my mind. Do you think I'm on the right track there, or do you think I should go back to following my breath – help! Maybe I'm getting mindfulness mixed up with meditation – help again!

I do at least 20 minutes of meditation and about 20-30 minutes of loving kindness. It's easy to wish someone well when you like them but not so easy when you don't, so that bit is hard. I know you don't have to like a person to wish them

well, but that's something I need to sort out myself.

When I do my meditation I even out my breathing (not so easy sometimes) and I observe my feelings.



They are so fleeting, aren't they? It could be boredom one minute and then enthusiasm the next. What I've learnt is not to avoid these feelings but just acknowledge and accept them, then let them go. Brilliant!

Ed: You ask a good question about how much attention to pay to the workings of the mind when meditating. Actually, you answered your own question when you describe how you relate to your feelings: "Acknowledge, accept and let them go!" It is good that you notice your thoughts coming and going, but this is not the purpose of meditation. The way to meditate - and this only comes gradually and with time - is to try and let even the observing go. Then the meditation can continue. If you do this, you will find the space between observer / observing / observed will diminish, if that makes sense. It's hard to put into words, but another way of putting it is that the 'thinking' lessens, clearing the mind. This is why it is best to keep focussing on the breath. Simple, but hard!

Thank You so much for your letters, books and clearing the head, Releasing the Body's the whole experience had really hit me for six. As well as suffering depression I also started having panic attacks and Started hoving anxiety issues. Mysleep Gloon from pur fire trateixs non 2001 not shot off. After receiving your Books and techniques and things have been improving greatly. From being regative in mind and soul, I now try to have a positive outlook on life, always trying to take a positive out a negative. It inspired me to attend the Gym and take up various education courses. I now meditate regularly and clear my with gradual improvement with my sleeping and my panic attacks are very infrequent. I know I have a long way to go, but one day at a time, and with the help of the Phoenix Trust, I will get through

From a friend at HMP Bure

# Soaps are for Cleaning

## From HMP & YOI Swinfen Hall

Traditionally weekends are special days. Saturday is the day you normally treat yourself down the market. Sunday is the lazy day (or the PJ day) where you do nothing and then Monday-

Friday is where you do all the work. So why not plan one week to keep the tradition?

In most jails
we are banged
up when
the soaps
are on.
Good old

Neighbours, Home and Away, Hollyoaks or Eastenders, Emmerdale then Coronation Street. Some people spend 3 ½ hours watching the soaps, and that's just on a Monday! What do you really learn from it? Who's killed who, who breaks up, who sleeps around. How about you give up just an hour of that time to find out about yourself?

An hour a day is plenty of time to cleanse your body, soul and mind. Spend ten minutes cleaning your cell so that the air you breathe is clean and fresh. Then spend half an hour doing yoga to strengthen the connection between mind and body. After that, sit in meditation for

20 minutes.

And then reflect. What went well? What were some problems that came up? But



most importantly, congratulate yourself for finishing and sticking with it, because it is hard

By the end of the week you'll have spent five hours getting to know yourself and sorting your head out. That's got to be worth a treat on Saturday. (I like to treat myself to a few chocolate hobnobs to dunk in my tea while watching a film!)

Try it for a week, see how it goes.

## Yoga In The Park...



any of you have mentioned being able to exercise or do yoga outside over the summer. In June, I too had a chance to practise outside, at a great yoga event in Leicester's Abbey Park. Nerissa Fields, a yoga teacher at HMYOI Glen Parva, organised Yoga in the Park, a yogathon to raise funds and awareness for the PPT. Seventy people came out to practise together, ranging from seven-year-old Freddie to 81-year-old Barbara, and Lucia, who was 32 weeks pregnant. Each paid to attend, and some also raised sponsorship.

We started by warming up in groups. Then Nerissa read a prisoner's letter about practising yoga outside and I spoke about the Trust and the benefits of yoga and meditation for people in prison. Then we started the sun salutations. Some did 108 on their own. Other groups did 108

between them. It took about an hour and a half and a bongo player kept us going.

To end we came together in a circle to do the tree pose. The event raised an impressive amount of money, and awareness of prison yoga. Many thanks to Nerissa, and to everyone who took part.

## ... And at Ashfield

Adam, a friend of the Trust's, organised a full week of fund-raising activities at Ashfield prison over the summer, all geared towards well-being and fitness. These included a 5 mile race, a sponsored walk, power weightlifting demonstrations and competition, an art exhibition, yoga and tai-chi classes, and a football match. Sally and Sam from the PPT were honoured to join one of Adam's yoga classes as students, and to lead a meditation session after Adam's professionally delivered session. The PPT is grateful to Adam for his hard work, creativity, and the amazing amount of funds the week generated, and to those who contributed.



"To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but it is to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

- Nelson Mandela former revolutionary, prisoner and President of South Africa (1918 - 2013)



Keeping prisoners in mind at the end of the yogathon

# Stillness and Struggle

## From Neil

Neil got in touch again not long ago, because he thought his experience would be helpful to people facing similar struggles. We think so too. This is what he told us down the phone.

Neil was in and out of institutions since he was 15. In one prison, he got We're All Doing Time. Each time he read it, it went deeper and had more positive effects. Five years ago, he left crime and using drugs behind when he walked out of HMP Manchester. He hasn't used since. But he still struggles. He said, "I struggle with a default setting I have which is the same setting that used to turn me back to drugs and crime. Instead of struggling to stay drug free, it's now more a struggle to stay on the path, and to keep coming back to basics."

Neil says it's difficult to pay his rent. He appreciates that he is one of a very few number of people still receiving benefits, but says he must find a certain amount of money each month to meet the rent gap that benefits don't cover. "I still struggle with nicotine, and each time I smoke a cigarette, I realise this cuts into my rent, food or broadband. It's a real balancing act."

He also struggles with long term, meaningful relationships, and that while he always seeks out like-minded people, they are few and far between. He says, "Most people I meet are full of fear or are still in the craziness of the world. But I do have a few long term friendships."

He said, "I'd been finding myself in an agitated and distressed state, but after reading your recent newsletter, I said to myself. 'That's it. That's what I need to hear. It's the stillness and the meditation.' And I remembered how it works. If I'm struggling with something - it doesn't matter if it was wanting to use again, or if it's like it is these days: how am I going to make ends meet - I know that an answer is to be found in stillness. I might be sat in a chair, or walking down a road. In the middle of all the agitation, I realise I can let everything be as it is, without trying to change it. And then I just do some breathing and basic meditation, which usually brings some serenity. Then the answer to whatever the problem is becomes clear."

# The Little Salt Doll

**By PPT Patron Sister Elaine MacInnes** 



Elaine Sister MacInnes is Catholic Nun and Zen Master, and Director the Prison Phoenix Trust from 1993 -1999. She went on to set up Freeing the Human Spirit, which

offers yoga meditation to prisoners in Canada. She celebrated her 90th birthday earlier this year. This story, which speaks beautifully of the process of letting go that so many of you say you are discovering in meditation, is taken from her book, Zen Contemplation.

nce upon a time, there was a little doll made of salt who had made a long pilgrimage on dry land. One day she came to the sea, which was something she had never seen before.

Here she found herself confronting a phenomenon she felt she could not possibly know or understand. There she was, a little solid doll of salt, standing on firm ground, watching another sort of ground that was not firm at all, but was moving and insecure and noisy and strange and unknown. She felt she could never get to know or understand it.

Nevertheless, the little doll walked right up to the edge of the sea and asked, "What are you?"

The sea replied, "I am me."

The doll said, "I've never seen anything like you before. I don't know you at all. I'd like to though. Please help me and tell me how I can come to know you."

answered, "Touch me."

The little doll shyly put forth her foot and touched the water. Oh, how different! She felt a unique thing happening, and knew

was somewhat lighter, something she had never experienced before. But it did give her the feeling that the sea could be knowable. She withdrew her leg, and as it came out of the water, she could see that

"What have you done to me?" she

her toes had disappeared.

The sea replied kindly, "You have given something in order to understand."

At first the doll was disconcerted, and wasn't sure just how profitable this exchange really was. But she did feel better, and went into the sea again, a little further, so that she would understand more deeply. Once again the sea took away more of her salt. Strangely enough, this gave her a liberated feeling, so she went farther and farther into the sea. At each succeeding moment she seemed to understand more deeply, although all the while she was losing more of her salt.

Her determination kept her going, and so did the ultimate question, "But what IS the sea?"

Finally, a big wave engulfed her, and as it dissolved the last of her salt, the little doll cried out in great happiness.

"Now I know what the sea is ... It is I!"





# Waking Up

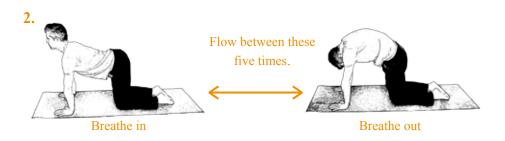


Yoga is a great way to start the morning. It gets your blood pumping, warms stiff joints, lifts your mood and helps you begin your day focussed and calm. Try this short sequence as soon as you wake up. Give it a week and see how it can set you up for a good day.



Hold each pose for five long, slow breaths.



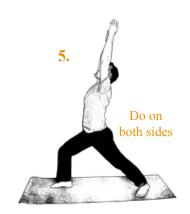














66 Be willing to be a beginner every single morning. 99

~ Meister Eckhart, German mystic 1260-1327

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. One way you can help is to consider remembering us in your will. Any sum, however small, is much appreciated.

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

