



Newsletter, Spring 2011



TAKEN BY SURPRISE!

How many times has someone looked at you funny or taken the mickey in a way you didn't like? For most of us, this has happened too often to count. For some of us, it happens way too often each day. The shame and humiliation from these slights can be overwhelming. Before you know what's happening, you might be straight in there with a comeback, a fist or something worse. Everyone knows the overpowering fury that can result from humiliation. And it is normal to lash out and fight back: of course we want to get rid of feeling humiliated.

Many of you write that you have discovered a way of not rising to the bait, not playing the game. On page 2 for example, one prisoner says that yoga and meditation help her not be affected by other people's negativity. She is one of many who tell how they are able to deal in a satisfying way with insults and injustices, in large part because of their yoga and meditation.

Something fascinating is at work when you don't fall into the trap of lashing out. Somehow the inward sense of "me" and "mine" is less, so there is less to be irritated or offended – a smaller target if you like. With less of a sense of "me", our sense that things ought to go just as we want them to also becomes less. And then things are not as upsetting and don't cause as much aggro. This is different from thinking we're no good or worthless. Then, the sense of self is just as strong. It's just a negative sense.

Avoiding these twin pitfalls of lashing out because of shame, or taking it on board and believing you're hopeless is tricky. But it's helped massively by a regular practice of keeping the

attention on your breathing. When you are concentrating just on your breath for even just a few minutes, you give your mind a rest from all of that "self-positioning" – I'm like this; I'm not like that – and instead tap into your real self. What exactly you are tapping into is harder to put into words, far vaster and more full of potential than we can imagine. Ironically, it is always here, always was, always will be. This is not at all impossible to experience.

One friend inside who had been practising yoga and meditation for seven months told how he accidentally bumped into someone in the library, who then threatened to punch him. Although he felt it wasn't his fault and could feel rage, something allowed him to keep his cool and he apologised and the tension was diffused. To his surprise, the next day the same man approached to ask him what his secret was. They soon became



Freeing the legs, freeing the mind at Cloverhill Prison (see page 5 for details on recent yoga workshops in Ireland)

friends.

The next time you are insulted, you might not necessarily be paying attention to your breath, but something useful can be strengthened with silent-mind meditation and breath-focused yoga, something that will respond in just the right way – and may even take you by surprise.



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

“Spring has returned. The Earth is like a child that knows poems.”

- Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)



ABOUT THE PRISON PHOENIX TRUST

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

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



Prisoners'



From HMP Woodhill

I have been reading my prison paper *Inside Time*, and following Part One and Two of the serialisation of the book *Freeing the Spirit* which I find very helpful indeed. And the effects of the meditation and yoga have helped a great deal to control my mind and well-being. It has helped me become more relaxed in everyday things in prison life. And also more aware of many things in my life and in my mind most of all. Since my mum died three years ago I have felt lost in my mind and body. But now since reading Part One and Two I am slowly putting the past behind me and moving forward. Things are getting better.

From HMP Bronzefield

Thank you so much for my new book and CD. I'm continually doing yoga and meditation in the quiet hours of the morning and am reaping the benefits. A lady asked me how I always glow, so I told her yoga, meditation and prayer. I do not think somebody has paid me a compliment in years and I actually held it and took it on board! Now that is something very new to me!



From HMP Littlehey

Some 50 years ago I learnt my method "it's all in the breath" to help with my asthma. But over the years I found it helps with relaxation which leads to a type of meditation that is so important to me, outside and in prison. In spite of there being a multitude or hundreds of beliefs/religions in the world today, most people want peace without war and good health without loss, hurt or pain. Well-being, peace, is what we all would like, not material items. Tolerance cannot be shaped but can be used by a portion of meditation, good breathing, control of one's life through listening, learning, along with a type of love for life. If you have that, you are rich in understanding of why we are here and hopefully to pass it on to others. No religion required, just a

belief in people, goodness and so much more.

I want to thank you for your book, *We're All Doing Time* and the CD *Clearing the Head, Relaxing the Body*, and more recently the newsletter. It is a help to all us prisoners that are in the same situation. Even if you only read small amounts of the book at any given time, there is after all no rush. During my time in prison since early 2008 up until now, I have learnt to cope, be tolerant, be thoughtful, talk to those that are just left in the corner; in other words I have changed from a material person to a helping person. I am an epilepsy sufferer, and the only Jewish prisoner in the prison, but that, now, is not important. What is important is to pass the good on to others. I listen to others which helps them; in fact, I will do anything in my power to help.

I do have a sentence with no definite date of release but so do others. I will get released one day; meantime I work positively towards that and carry on helping.



From HMP Coldingley

I see myself as a wanderer, but 'seeker' would also fit. I have deep trust issues, a remnant of my childhood, which reinforce my desire to move along and not get attached to people, places and things. It has its good and bad points.

I have taken your suggestion and have begun regular breathing practice before bed and in the morning. It has been helpful in dissipating my restless night energy and I have found myself tuning out the TV earlier and earlier each night.

From HMP Morton Hall

I found *Freeing the Spirit* and the CD *Clearing the Head* most helpful. The meditation is amazing. Since starting I feel happier and more patient. This has opened a door that has led me to a better way of thinking – if it hasn't set me free, at the very least it's put me on the path. I cannot thank you enough for the joy and peace I now have in life and I'll be sure to carry on when free from prison. Even after a few short weeks, I've noticed a big difference. This book and CD has been a blessing in disguise.



From HMP Forest Bank

Since I last wrote you a letter, I have enrolled in a stress busters class. This does a bit of everything from yoga to breathing and relaxing. I am so grateful for the CD and book that you sent me. I have used methods from both stress busters and the CD. Every day I meditate. Since I have got your help I have given up smoking and I had a filling done to my tooth which has been very painful. But I meditated and told my mind that it does not hurt and after I finished meditation it didn't hurt any more. I have been smoking for 10 years. In the past, when I've tried to stop smoking I have failed every time even with help from the doctor i.e. patches and stuff. This time it is different. I don't



All food is a gift!

Letters



need any help from the doctor. I have started to find myself. When I am doing my daily practice I tell myself I do not need a cigarette, a cigarette needs me. It is working through meditation. It is like I am free when I meditate. I forget about everything in my life that is bothering me and just concentrate on my body and mind.



From HMP The Mount

The book and CD benefit me all day long every day of the week. My head, body and breathing have become so much clearer. If only all prisons practised this, had a teacher or whatever, I am sure a lot more people would benefit and stop taking drugs due to stress and the environment we find ourselves in.

From HMP Forest Bank

Thank you for your letter. While the PPT have been able to offer me good support, i.e. through the books, the letters you send are also uplifting in spirit. I only have one friend on the outside and no family. I get a great big smile when I get your letters. I've nearly finished reading *We're All Doing Time* – it's a great read for my mind, body and soul. Reading the books and my yoga practice, breathing and meditation are part of my daily routine now.



My body has never felt so good and my mind is at ease. I wrote in a letter to a fellow Christian friend this week "all my life I've been lost or so caught up in my own self-centredness, it's like my whole life I've been in prison. And now I'm actually in prison, I feel so free, so calm, and at ease with life, peace". I mean this with all my heart.



From Portlaoise Prison

Thank you for the book and CD. I have been doing yoga for six months and I find it very helpful in many ways. It's something I never had any interest in. At first I found it daunting and embarrassing until I got used to it. I now practise yoga three times a week and always look forward to the class. It's a brilliant way to relax and feel rejuvenated at the same time. It helps me through my sentence.

From HMP Forest Bank

I am a practising Buddhist and have started doing the yoga classes here with our teacher Heidi. Although I have only been practising for five weeks I have already started to feel the benefits. It is helping me get through my sentence. Other prisoners and medical staff have commented on an amazing change in my appearance and like to see that I always have a smile on my face (which did not exist before I started doing yoga). The only thing I dislike about our 1 hour 40 minute yoga sessions is that it seems like I am only there for about 30 minutes and wish we could have more lessons each week. I have started to practise alone in my cell and am getting slow improvement with poses.



From HMP Lewes

I was on my way to CLAIT (Computer Literacy & Information Technology) but it was cancelled so I came to the yoga class. I was doubtful on managing

the poses. The first one was so hard I nearly quit. To my surprise the second one was easier. I probably hadn't been in some of the positions before or since I was a child! I feel alive, aware of my body! Meditation, on reflection I cried. Stillness. An asthmatic since two years old, my breathing is much easier. Roll on next week's class!

From HMP Parkhurst

Usually I like to rise at least an hour before they open the cell door and practise some yoga and then meditate. I can then embrace the new day with a calm, clear, positive feeling. I have been practising the few yoga moves I learnt from two issues of *Inside Time* for seven weeks now. I am sure my posture and circulation have improved. Yesterday my mother remarked on a visit that I seemed taller!

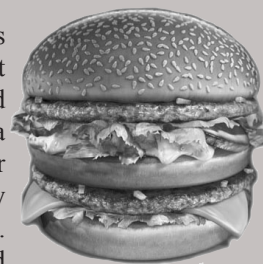


Meditation Corner

Meaty matters

By Jason 

Sometimes we receive letters from prisoners asking what type of food they should choose to complement their yoga practice. Others feel that their practice is spoilt because they cannot choose the food they want. Someone wrote the other week and asked if turning vegetarian would help him sit in the lotus position.



So do you follow a yogic diet? At the moment I am eating a bag of mixed nuts, had a salad sandwich for lunch and muesli for breakfast. All acceptably purifying without being finickity. But I am also on my fifth cup of tea today, my second chocolate biscuit, and over the weekend I had chips, cake, a bag of sweets and a beefburger. I try to avoid becoming fussy about food and drawing attention to myself, which is perhaps why the food I choose isn't necessarily the healthiest (maybe this is why I find the lotus uncomfortable!). Many people in the world have very little choice in their diet, so I'm keen to cultivate a simple attitude towards food. But I'm also aware of my intolerance to the fussiness of others.

Oddly enough, during meditation none of this matters. With a still posture and even breathing, likes and dislikes disappear. If I choose to fill my stomach with anything I come across that's fine. But others may be rather more discerning and that is also to be respected. Of course people in prison may want food that is different to the menu. With a limited choice and strict regime, who wouldn't want the freedom to choose only their favourite food?

When the mind calms and our own preferences drop away, it is possible to see that all food is a gift, and whether we are in prison or outside, whatever keeps us fed should be respected. So will becoming a vegetarian make the lotus position easier? I'll let you know after my morning tea and cake.





Lightness and strength: Gym yoga

by Elaine 



To be healthy all muscles need to be both strong and flexible. While it may be tempting to just go for building bulk, the stretches here will help ease tightness and pain and greatly improve your workout. You *can* be both well-built and flexible with a little change to your routine. While doing these stretches, be sure to keep your attention on the breath. If you find your breathing is really erratic and laboured, you have gone too far and need to back off. This practice can be done either before or after your workout or, ideally, both.

Cow's face

This stretches the upper body, including the triceps, biceps, deltoids and pectorals.

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart, your legs slightly bent and your tailbone stretching down.
- Place a sock over your right shoulder.
- Place the back of your left hand as high up the middle of your back as possible.
- Use the right hand behind your back to ease your left elbow in.
- Take hold of the sock in the right hand and stretch the right arm up with the upper arm behind the ear.
- Lower the right hand down behind the head until the sock meets the left hand. Gently ease the hands as close together as possible. You may find you can clasp the fingers or hands together.
- Check that your head isn't leaning forward and that your face and jaw are relaxed.
- If you can, move your right elbow back as far as is comfortable.
- Hold and breathe for ten breaths.
- Repeat on the other side.



Spinal rotation and abdominal stretch

- Lie on your back, with arms stretched out at shoulder level, knees bent, and feet flat on the floor, next to each other and close to the body.
- Keeping your shoulder blades flat on the floor, drop your knees to one side. You may be able to get your knees to the floor.
- Hold for 10 natural breaths.
- Repeat on the other side.

Glute stretch

- Lying on your back with both feet flat on the floor, cross your left leg over your right leg so your left ankle is resting just above the right knee.
- Take your left hand through the triangle you have made with your legs and your right hand to the outside of the right thigh.
- Clasp the thigh of your right leg firmly with both hands and gently pull towards you.
- Keep your head on the floor. If this isn't possible, prop up the head with a pillow or book. Feel the stretch in your bottom and your outer left thigh.
- Hold the stretch for 10 breaths. Breathe slowly and evenly.
- Repeat on the other side.



Lower back stretch

- Lie on your back and pull both knees up towards the chest.
- Hug your knees to your chest as tightly as you can, keeping your lower back on the floor.
- Hold for 10 breaths.



Chest stretch

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and your legs slightly bent.
- Interlace your fingers behind your back.
- Pull your abdominal muscles in and keep your head, neck and shoulders relaxed.
- Keeping your back straight, lift your arms away from your back until you can feel the stretch across your chest. You should feel your chest opening.
- Hold the stretch for 10 breaths.

Upper back stretch

- Stand with your feet hip width apart and your legs slightly bent.
- Straighten your arms out in front of you and clasp your fingers together.
- Gently push your hands away from you and round your upper back bringing your chin towards your chest.
- Feel the stretch across your upper back and at the back of your shoulders.
- Hold for 10 breaths.



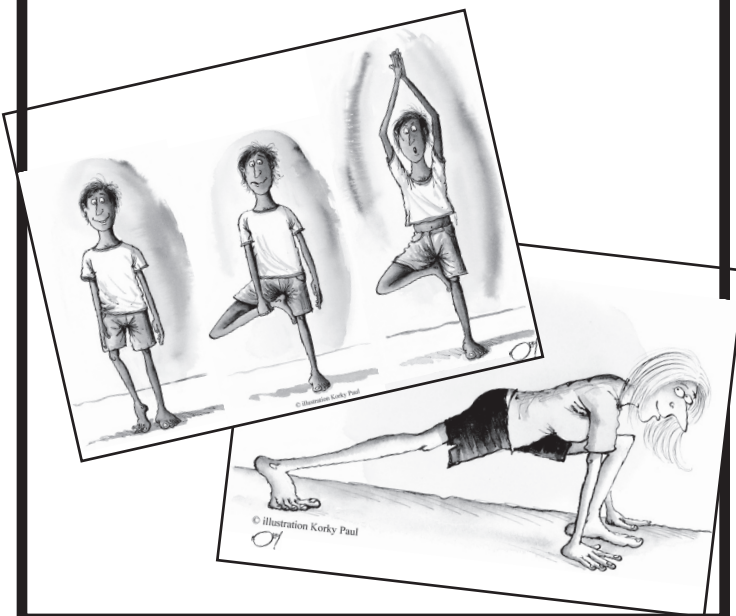
Competition

We know that you have such great knowledge of anatomy and physiology from all your gym work. Do you have any other stretches which you use to complement your training? We're offering a prize of a pack of 12 postcards (see below) to the best entries and we'll print them in the next newsletter. You will need to describe how to do the stretch as well as what it's good for. Send entries to our address on the front page of this newsletter by 1st July 2011.

New postcards for sale

We have produced a pack of 12 colour postcards featuring yoga poses on the front drawn by Korky Paul and thought-provoking quotes on the back, with plenty of room for your own message. Each pack is £7.

To order, please tell us how many packs you want and your name and address, and send a cheque payable to The Prison Phoenix Trust at The PPT, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF.



Happy days in Dublin and Arklow

Luisa and Sam crossed the Irish Sea recently to hold taster yoga and meditation workshops for inmates and officers in four prisons. We started in Shelton Abbey open prison in Arklow, where we had a great session with residents John, Fran and Fidel among others. We learned from another man just how effective yoga is in helping with heroin detox. Someone else said that yoga would be invaluable helping him hold down a job when he gets out: he had seen how good it is for self-control. The silence during the final meditation was fantastic, even with the talkative ducks outside.



Cloverhill Prison in Dublin also opened their doors for inmates' workshops. Vasilie and Hassan were among the men who joined us in the gym. Dave and Caitriona came to the staff workshop, along with 18 other officers. Next door in Wheatfield Prison, we worked in an open space in the library, with a capable and dedicated group of men, including Stephen.

In Mountjoy, where David runs a yoga class on Thursday nights, we held two workshops for inmates, and one for officers. Niall, Benny and Gerry all put themselves completely into the yoga and meditation. We weren't at all surprised to find that everyone in all four prisons was able to focus and try challenging postures. They brought impressive concentration and calm to the meditation at the end of each workshop. We hope that weekly classes will start soon where there are none.



Back of the net: Yoga and football

Adapted from articles by Phil Aston and Lara McCreddie

The beautiful game is associated more with David Beckham and big money than eastern exercises. Find out why footballers are turning to yoga to overcome injury and hone their skills on the pitch.

David James, Bristol City and one time England goalkeeper, took up yoga as with most sportsmen, following an injury. A knee ligament injury caused during a World Cup match in 2001 had taken him out of action for four months.

"I came to yoga as part of my rehabilitation process but quickly saw the benefit of an ongoing practice," David said. "I now have regular sessions to keep my muscles flexible, my body aligned and my mind free from stress!"

Ailon Freedman, David's yoga instructor said David is an unusual case. "He is unique. You'd expect a footballer to be really stiff but David is really flexible. He can even do poses that I can't do."

However, it seems the real reason David does yoga is the mental support it brings. As a goalkeeper, you spend a lot of time standing on your own between the posts, usually suffering abuse from both your supporters and the other side's fans. Yoga helps you to ignore these outside

distractions, allowing you to concentrate on defending the goal – maybe David Seaman should book in for a few sessions.

Ryan Giggs has also spoken widely of his debt to hatha yoga, helping him to recover from those hamstring injuries and prolonging his glittering career. In fact, Giggsy is so into yoga, he even released his own yoga DVD earlier this year.

Footballers using yoga is not just a UK phenomenon: American footballers have also discovered its benefits. Ted Johnson previously played for the New England Patriots. He prepared for the adrenaline rush of playing in front of 60,000 fans by doing yoga. He started because various



injuries had affected flexibility in his upper body – a crucial part of the anatomy for an American player.

And yoga offered other plusses. Johnson for it made him more centred and better able to make fast decisions with greater clarity.

Life coach and yoga teacher Phil Aston explains why yoga can be such an integral part of a footballer's fitness regime: "Many sporting activities build up the part of the body the sport relies on most", he says. "But yoga is a discipline that ensures each part of the body is worked mindfully and in balance with each other. So our levels of strength and stamina are balanced on each side. The most important aspect is breathing. Because yoga works the body in conjunction with the breath, the mind builds up a connection between movement and breathing."

He continues, "When you are playing in front of a large, fired-up and occasionally aggressive crowd, it is the mental aspect of yoga that is most beneficial. Yoga teaches us to operate in the present moment. This means our minds can access more effectively the information coming in from the other senses more quickly, and without any of the unnecessary dialogue. Yoga can also give a footballer better spatial awareness, which is obviously very effective in a game where the decision about where to pass the ball has to be made by a player in a matter of seconds."

So it seems that yoga is losing its image of being just for wimps. It is worth noting that Rodrigo Mallada, a player for the Paraguay World Cup squad, won the 1998 World Artistic Rhythmic Yoga Sport Cup. So you can do yoga and be macho after all!

News and announcements

New website



We have launched a new website at www.theppt.org.uk. On it, you can find out more about our work, read some great testimonials from prisoners and prison staff and keep abreast of our latest news and plans. Many thanks go to the yoga class at HMP Bullingdon for helping us with the photos.

Best way to donate

We are grateful to the more than 150 supporters of the Trust, who make regular donations by completing a Banker's Order in our favour. Beginning each financial year knowing that we can rely on the funding from these regular donations as the year progresses is reassuring, allowing us to focus more on our work of yoga and meditation in prisons and other secure conditions.

If you aren't yet making a regular commitment (monthly/quarterly/annually) but feel you may be able to, please write and request a Banker's Order form which when complete we will send to your bank for processing. Any amount would be more than welcome.



YOU'RE IT!

By Hafiz, Persian poet, 1320-1389

God
Disguised
As a myriad things and
Playing a game
Of tag

Has kissed you and said,
"You're it –
I mean, you're really IT!"

Now
It does not matter
What you believe or feel
For something wonderful,

Major Wonderful
Is someday going
To
Happen.



Following the inner light

By Barrie

Between 1993 and 1998 Barrie spent some time at a regional secure unit in Wakefield with conditions similar to prison. In 2000, he moved into his own accommodation, and has kept his friendship up with the PPT through regular letters.



While I was in Waterstone's the other day, I bumped into a doctor who was my psychiatrist all the time I was locked up. He was really friendly, although he couldn't remember my name. It was 12 years since I left there. He asked me how I was getting on and what I was doing these days, and when I kept addressing him as doctor, he said, "Please call me John." He said it was good to see how his former patients were doing in life, especially when they were doing well, as I seemed to be. My new

girlfriend was with me at the time as well, and he shook hands with her and wished her well. It was an uplifting experience.

I seem to be picking up in mood and progress quite quickly these days. It would be easy for me to get caught up in the gimmicky world of computers, hi-definition TVs and mobile phones, but I try to keep my feet firmly on the ground if I can.

Despite all my possessions, no experience in my life matches up to the inner light and the calmness and peace

which accompanies it, which I saw for a few hours when I had been close to death at the age of 26. That little pinpoint of light guides me through my life and has slowly, over a period of many years, brought me to the place in life where I am now, from a state of utter and complete hopelessness and danger and self-persecution. I will never abandon that now even to the point of death and following the light is my "raison d'être" in life.

All things change

At times I experience being at peace with things quite deeply while at other times things get in the way. It can be frustrating because when you experience peace, it's such a great feeling that you want it to stay with you all the time. Then seemingly for no reason it slips away and life's problems encroach on you and disturb things. It is quite important at those times to not get too frustrated with this.

There is no such thing as perfect peace lasting from our early days right up to the end of our lives. The thing to do is to not let this frustrating loss of a peaceful feeling get you down. I now regard dealing with it as a challenge and make sure it doesn't defeat me or discourage me.



Life force

Martha Graham (1894 –1991)

Martha Graham was an American dancer and choreographer, regarded as one of the foremost pioneers of modern dance. She had many beautiful things to say about being an artist which apply to all of us who seek to live our lives more fully and more truly, including this:

There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression

is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable, nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open.



Rivers of Calm: Part Two




By Luisa


Have you noticed that when you are breathing through the left nostril your mind tends to be more quiet and introverted and when you're breathing through the right you are in a more active, outgoing state? When breathing through the right we stimulate the left brain and are more likely to be better at practical and analytical tasks. Conversely, while breathing out of the left nostril the right brain is working, where creative thinking is more natural.


We breathe in a rhythm called the 'nasal cycle', where we breathe between 45-120 minutes mostly through one nostril, a few minutes through both, then 45-120 minutes through the other. It is the few minutes in between, when we are breathing through both nostrils, that the ancient yogis found was important, as in that time they found that the mind is really clear and sharp.

But what does this mean for us? I've found that being aware of which nostril is dominant helps me balance out when I'm either really tired and need to be active, or when I'm awake at night with a busy mind. Here's what I do:


 **Sit in a comfortable upright position. Tuck the index and middle fingers of your right hand in, keeping the thumb, ring and little fingers out.**




 **Bring the right hand up to your face. Place your thumb close to your right nostril and your ring finger and little finger by your left. Your left hand can stay resting on your knee or in your lap.**


 **Breathe deeply out and in through both nostrils. Keeping the head straight, close off your right nostril with your thumb and breathe out through the left. The breath should be slow, steady and full.**


 **Breathe in through the left nostril to the count of five.**

 **At the end of the inhale, close off both nostrils, tuck your chin into your chest, keeping your back straight, and draw up your pelvic floor and lower belly. Hold for the count of five.**

 **Then lift the chin, release the pelvic floor, lower belly and thumb, and breathe out through the right to the count of five.**

 **Breathe in through the right to the count of five.**

 **At the end of the inhale, close off both nostrils, tuck your chin into your chest, keeping your back straight, and draw up your pelvic floor and lower belly. Hold for the count of five.**

 **Raise your chin, release the ring finger from the left nostril and breathe out through the left to the count of five.**

 **Repeat this sequence 5-10 times, building up the repetitions as you become more familiar with the practice.**

You can practice this any time during the day to help balance out your mood and energy. Or if you're in bed and just can't sleep, try lying on your right side which opens up your left nostril and quiets the mind. Let me know if it works for you!

“Sitting quietly, doing nothing, spring comes, and the grass grows by itself.”

- Zen proverb



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.

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PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF
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