



## Newsletter, Summer 2010

# ONE HEART

**E**ver since Patrick got out of prison earlier this year he has stayed clean from drugs and drink. A fantastic achievement!

In the last newsletter he asked three questions ... How can you reduce the "me" culture you've grown used to? How can you stop bad thoughts about others? What do Buddhists mean when they talk about "no self"?

Most of us wrestle with those first two questions, and to quote Patrick: "don't like having selfish negative thoughts". Human beings suffer with the delusion that we are separate from each other and from the rest of the world and cause ourselves endless torment because we believe we should have what we want, should be first, and should be able to control events.

Patrick says his daily meditation helps him a lot. When he sits quietly, fully aware of his breath, attentive to each moment of breathing, gradually it is dawning on him that in his deepest spirituality we cannot be apart from anyone or anything in this ancient and eternal universe. Essentially, we are not alone!

Simply by putting aside time for this simple, regular practice, the fact of our oneness strengthens – and even starts to show itself in little ways. Gradually the "me" culture starts to recede. There is litter on the floor so we pick it up; someone needs help and we offer it. Little by little, it doesn't even matter whether we are first or last in the queue.

Life starts to unfold to us moment by interesting moment. When the fact of our oneness sits comfortably in all of our cells, we are free to respond in the way each situation invites us

to. Then it is easy to see that what causes us to malign others in our thoughts is a feeling of injury. If we explore that thought we can usually pinpoint the moment we felt hurt. Then we can check if we acted in

a way which provoked it. Or not. As

we start to recognise the other as part of our self we start to understand where they are coming from. The other *is* our self! (Then we might be able to examine forgiveness.)

At heart we know that the way to misery is me, myself and I. And the road to happiness is to serve others. Buddhists say that to know the self is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self allows body and mind to fall away so we can wake up to the ten thousand things in the

universe. This is the no self that Buddhists talk about.

Patrick though is also a miraculous unique life form! Like each of us he is a vast storehouse of universal potential. So when Patrick says he is managing to stay clean, it makes us happy. Not just because he is our brother, but because we are not separate. This is the one heart Bob Marley sings about.



A prison officer stretches out in the cobra pose during the weekly lunchtime staff class at HMP Bullingdon



**Love Sandy - and Jo, Jason, Sam, Kate, Kaye, Clive & David**

**“The whole world lives within a safeguarding... nothing is ever alone for a single moment.”**

- the Persian poet, Rumi (1207 - 1273)



### 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, workshops and weekly classes.*



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# War! - and Peace



By Jason

Over the last few months we have received letters from prisoners mentioning the war in Afghanistan. It is hard to avoid it with in-cell television. We all hold feelings about war because conflicts arise wherever we find ourselves.

I was thinking about this a few minutes ago when I washed my hands - and in the process destroyed living organisms struggling to hang onto life. Just sustaining a healthy body means the constant destruction of microscopic life-forms, all of which share the survival urge I have. When our bodies cannot win over nature any longer, it is our time to die.

Although all of us are engaged in a survival struggle within Creation how miraculous it is that humans flourish at all! But we do and everyone has a measure of control in their lives - vital if we are to live in this unpredictable world.

When I rode my motorbike to the office today I certainly appreciated my control over it. Every different situation we come across is a new challenge and mastering skills is one of the most rewarding things we can do. Sometimes though, we men in particular take this too far and turn control into subjugation.

I didn't tell you that someone on a smaller motorbike overtook me, and part of me wanted to slam past him just to show him what's what! (Add a wheelie, a bared bottom and a one fingered gesture, and he would be in no doubt who is the real boss.) (Real boss? Oh dear!)

So which part of me stopped this from happening? Partly it's not being able to ride one handed with my trousers down! Mostly though it's because of regular meditation practice.

With a still and quiet mind, gradually the breath allows the rest of the answer to arise. As the mind clears, I start to accept myself and not wish to be different.



## Let go of conflict

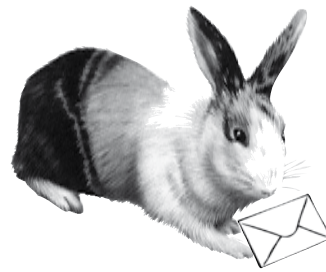


Back to the breath again. More thoughts start to arise. Did he really overtake me or was I simply travelling at a different speed? Faster, slower, bigger, smaller; I make all these judgements to help me feel in control. But is it really control anyway? Yes, in a sense it is. I can respond and observe this response and that helps me let go of conflict.

Back to the breath again. Eventually the motorbike situation just breaks up, the mind no longer wishing to hold the thoughts together. Now there is no subjugation, no desire to control, no feelings of inferiority or injury, no opinion and no need for any of this. Why on earth did someone overtaking me result in a feeling of injury and inferiority? What is that about? All these thoughts are just clutter blowing around inside. How good to be free of it all even though freedom sometimes seems to only last a moment.

Anyway, enough of all this - I'm hungry and want my dinner. My body needs feeding and the war to sustain health goes on... (while there is always the fun of another motorbike race to be won on the way home.)

Bike picture drawn by  
a prisoner at HMP Leeds



# Prisoners'

From HMP Hewell

There is a part of me that can still get violent when I become frightened. A friend of mine, who I know from the outside, is in prison at the moment in Bristol. He has written to me twice now. I wrote back to him last week when I received my second letter from him. In his letter he is expressing himself about his feelings and other problems doing time. I asked him if violence isn't just another form of fear and if you do defend yourself you can do so without fear in your heart, because this is something I have realised in my own life, so I am just trying to pass on some wisdom. I also gave him the address of The Prison Phoenix Trust and explained that you will give people some free books on meditation and yoga. He told me that there is a yoga class in Bristol prison and I encouraged him to put his name down for the class. They do counselling in Bristol prison and I suggested that he should put in an application to the Chaplaincy and explain to them why he needs counselling. I think to myself that I'm no better than him but he seems to see me as a positive role model in his life.

Another prisoner had a go at me the other day and I didn't react because at that time there was no anger in my heart. But afterwards I started to build up a resentment and I couldn't let it go. Then yesterday I was waiting to get my dinner and the inmate who had a go at me came up the stairs and smiled at me. My resentment left me because I realised he was having a bad day. I am still going to my AA meetings but I still think I can do it my way. But it was my way which ended me up in prison. I have come to realise that the 12 step programme is a spiritual programme and that I need to be open-minded to its healing power to restore me to sanity. I was speaking to my friend on the phone the other day; he is a devotee of Krishna, and I was telling him about the 12 step programme and he said they mention about surrendering to God, which is the same in the path of Bhakti Yoga. I received a letter from the Human Kindness Foundation during the week; they told me to keep in contact with yourselves and they said they will send me the newsletters three times a year. Thanks for your lovely letter, it's really nice to get positive feed-back. Take care and God bless you. Om TAT SAT.



From HMP Wandsworth

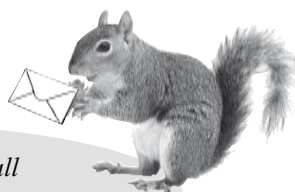
Without your help, by sending me the books I have asked for, which have given me a completely different outlook on life, I would not have been able to train my mind to make me a better person. I would not have been able to do my ROTLS work outside the prison. My outlook on everything, from watering my plants outside to building a brick wall, has changed.

Thanks for your rapid responses to my letters. The book (*Freeing the Spirit*) and the CD have been of great help to me with my meditation and yoga and I lend them to other inmates who I talk about the practice with. In the past I have lent my copy of *We're All Doing Time* to other cons who have found it a great help. One of my friends who is a lifer has moved to a different prison and before he went I borrowed *Freeing the Spirit* from him and I was really enjoying reading it but my friend took

# Letters



*We are happy to reply to all your letters and help in any way we can with your yoga and meditation.*



**Kuan Yin,  
Goddess of  
Compassion  
drawn by  
an inmate at  
HMP Wakefield**



**From HMP Guys Marsh**

**H**i. I started practising yoga and meditation in 2007 after doing a four day course in HMP Highdown on breathing, yoga and meditation. Eight out of ten of us finished and automatically without discussing it as an issue, found we had only smoked one or two cigarettes, instead of ten or fifteen in a day. After this I started a Buddhist group. I've been agnostic all my life and despise BS and rhetoric that is a substitute for reality and truth, when people find the truth does not suit their purpose.

I now practise yoga and meditation every day. My wing in Guys Marsh has a garden and I made a decision to practise in the garden publicly as an exercise to overcome my fear of unkind attitudes. Throughout the winter for hours at a time I sat in the snow. Peace and tranquillity pack more strength and energy than anger and ego. People didn't know how to react to me. One day I was standing in the tree position and I heard someone say, 'Didn't know we had a scarecrow on the wing.' but I was not offended by the comment. I laughed so much I fell over. It was after all funny.

I can see why yoga is a spiritual practice. I was a flabby dollop and now I feel like an Olympic gymnast. I lost 20kg and my body's new abilities make me feel a freedom I only dreamed of. Now I don't eat more than I need, and have fewer cravings or desires I cannot dismiss.

I feel strong, compassionate and in communion with Life. Before I felt afraid and angry, and a failure. It is spiritual in terms of purification of mind and body. It compliments Buddhism's truth and reality; brings order where there was chaos and confusion. And love...And I feel I am gaining the respect of people I was afraid of. You could replace all therapeutic activity in life with these practices. Inside and outside prison, and if only people had the courage, and strength of character, human society could change from Hell to Heaven. As does the life of the individual who accepts reality.

**From HMP Acklington**

**I** must admit my views on yoga and meditation were somewhat negative as it's not very manly but after seven days of counting my breaths and just sitting in total silence and darkness it has changed my views. I feel as though a big weight has been lifted off my shoulders. As you can probably imagine, I was stressed out to the max, worrying about the outside life. My son and my girlfriend, my business, the bills and the stress of being locked up as well. I was having



trouble sleeping and eating but the yoga has helped a lot. My trouble sleeping has changed as I've swapped counting sheep for counting my breaths and with the yoga as well as the gym four times a week, my appetite has come back as well. Don't get me wrong I still get stressed out but I am learning how to control it.



**From HMP Channings Wood**

**I** am very pleased with the way the CD, *Clearing the Head, Relaxing the Body through Meditation and Yoga* has helped me and my mind and body. You said on the CD I can write and let you know how I'm getting on with my meditation so I want to tell you the CD has played a great part in the release of the tension in my body. Thanks for that.

**From HMP Littlehey**

**T**he yoga is great, it stretches lots of different parts in a gentle way but the deep feeling of relaxation that follows is wonderful. The teacher is very good. There's 10 of us and she teaches each position in a way that the least supple (me) can benefit from those exercises, with slight alterations, just as much as the more nimble members in our group. She treats us with kindness and respect, which is highly valued in a prison. We are also learning correct breathing techniques, I savour each in-breath then slowly exhale. This gets us ready for meditation.

It took me a few weeks to get into the yoga class which is a new one – because it was so full and I couldn't even get on the waiting list and as you know I got pretty stressed about it but my persistence has paid off. I'm so lucky for this opportunity.

I'm very sorry to hear about your cat, Anita, and I'm glad she didn't suffer for a long time. Our oldest cat is 16 human years and me and my mum know she hasn't got very many more. It'll be hard for my mum when she does finally depart although we have another younger cat too. The younger one is a stray who chose us to look after her and she really loves Penny our elder cat. Penny puts up with her but every now and then gives her a swipe. Really they get on like chalk and cheese.





# Yogically speaking I came out!

From Jack in Suffolk

**W**hen I was on remand for two and a half years, I discovered The Prison Phoenix Trust and Bo Lozoff's wonderful book *We're All Doing Time*. I had been practising yoga since I was thirteen and could see that although I had lost my physical freedom, my body, breath and mind were still with me as tools with great potential. So I asked the Librarian to obtain every available yoga book for me. I could see that prison was a perfect place for spiritual growth and found myself gradually able to accept my circumstances and immerse deeply into yoga practice.

In 2001 I took The British School of Yoga teacher-training correspondence course for a year and was then able to devise and implement a yoga programme for inmates on the Stress Management Course - and later became the yoga teacher - at HMP Rye Hill. I also taught yoga, Chi Kung and meditation at HMP Belmarsh. Knowing at first hand what inmates experience on various levels day to day helped me see what it is in yoga that can be a force for positive growth. I truly know how much healing in prison yoga can achieve.

After practising yoga daily, sometimes for up to six hours (when banged-up for 24), finally I was released in August 2003 from a resettlement gaol. Those first steps outside felt strange. Going to Richmond Park with my two sons was truly memorable and not totally for obvious reasons. I retain a vivid picture of being amongst a crowd of people and feeling that I was watching, removed - as though viewing a film.

Work and the 'real world' were at first a

challenge that I grasped enthusiastically. Years sped by and I found myself just too busy (and stressed) even to do the sequence of Sun Salutations which had been a daily ritual for most of my life. I started a construction company which, as it grew, caused me to wonder what I was doing and where the flat out work schedule was leading me? I knew I was striving for more money, a bigger house, bigger accountancy/tax bills, and a new van but there was not even enough time to take a proper holiday.

## Started again

I began to feel that I didn't want to continue to make money for money's sake, and so in May of 2008, I sold my house and moved into a small flat. I took on less work and gradually started practising yoga again.

The six years of tension, both physical and mental, that had accrued while I was building the company, had left me struggling with the most basic postures.

Meditation - the 'chattering monkey' mind could not be silenced whatever technique I used. I plodded through my yoga weekly class and struggled with my self discipline in my home practice. Slowly, I could feel and see some form of improvement as body released mind and vice versa.

Then, towards the end of last summer, the kids having moved away, I decided to do what I have wanted to do since my earliest memories. I went to India to study to be a better yoga teacher. Yogically speaking - 'I came out'! During the year I studied and qualified in Kerala at the International Sivananda Yoga Centre and developed my practice later in Mysore with some wonderful, acclaimed tutors. I have just returned from the experience of a lifetime.

My enthusiasm for yoga makes me optimistic for myself and others. It is a way of life that gives us fulfilment beyond the ego, beyond the shallow day to day of keeping up appearances. Yoga helps you to create a new outlook and awareness and makes you feel good in your body by releasing tension. This reunites us with what and who we are.

I wish all those doing time 'inside' a positive mind set, strength and focus. In the parallel gaol world, focus on what you have and seize the moment - the grass is not always greener.

## May we introduce..?



**Luisa says:** 'Hello everybody. I'm Luisa and I've just joined the team here in Oxford this June as a Yoga Coordinator. I am so looking forward to meeting some of you soon.'

**Elaine says:** 'Hi everyone. You can do anything if you put your mind to it. Happiness is within but often we need some help to find it.'



**Lucy says:** 'It will be great to be part of the PPT team as the new Public Relations Officer, and to meet some of you through visits and letters. I'm looking forward to it.'

Luisa and Elaine, our new Yoga Coordinators

Lucy, our new Public Relations Officer

# LENGTHENING THE BACK



By Jo

*If you spend long hours lying on your cell bed this stretch will help you relieve the pressure many of you say you feel in your lower back as it lengthens the spine and relieves tension. It stretches your legs, improving your circulation. It opens the chest and develops your breathing wonderfully.*



Kate



Jo

**Cheers!**

**Jo says:** "In my 3 years at the PPT it's been lovely to practise yoga with some of you in so many prisons, and I've always appreciated opening the post and corresponding with you. Now I'm leaving to train as a literacy teacher."

**Kate says:** "Only once everything we cling to is taken away do we know what real practice is - deepest thanks to each of you for teaching me this. As I retire I will continue to practise alongside you day by day, breath by breath."

## Will you paint this year's PPT Christmas card?

We always look forward to receiving your designs for our Christmas card competition. From traditional to wacky, we love them all. Please send us an original design, in colour, on plain unlined paper, by the end of August. The winning design will be printed and sold to help us raise money for our work in prisons - and winner and runners up will all receive a pack of cards.

**Stand facing your bed, wall or back of a chair. Take your feet a little apart and bend forwards carefully from the hips, keeping your legs straight if you can, until you can place your hands on the wall, back of the chair, or the bed. If your bed is a low one, you might enjoy resting your straight arms across it, as your hands touch the wall beyond. Your body is a sort of L-shape. Adjust your distance, moving closer or further away until your legs are vertical and your trunk and arms are fully extended. Gradually straighten your legs, opening the back of the knees, and feel that from your waist you can allow your chest to drop down towards the floor opening your armpits and feeling the stretch along your straight arms.**



**Stay in this position and with your mouth closed, breathe slowly and naturally 5 – 10 times. Afterwards bend your knees and slowly stand up and recover. Then you can try it again, this time counting your breath from 1 to 5 as you inhale and 1 to 5 as you exhale. Count the breath like this three times. You can work up to stretching into this pose three times in all, each time holding it until you can fully relax into the stretch without feeling any strain at all. Go gently. Then enjoy how your whole body feels taller and lighter!**



Catching their breath from hours of shouting and running all over London, Sandy and Jo track Alex on their mobiles.

# Marathon Man... 3 hrs 19 mins!



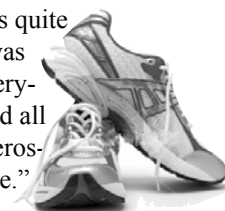
There's nothing like a banana when the stuffing's been knocked out of you.

**At exactly 9.45 on Sunday morning, Alex started racing in this year's London Marathon for The Prison Phoenix Trust - along with 35,000 other runners and a downpour of rain.**

Alex, who has been training hard along the Grand Union Canal and in Hyde Park for months, finished the 26 mile race just behind the elite runners in a magnificent time of 3 hours 19 minutes, and for all of us at the PPT it was a heart-stopping day of huge excitement as we sprinted from Canada Water to Canary Wharf and back to the Embankment to track his progress. We were praying that his recent knee injury would not prove a nuisance and it didn't.

Not only did Alex go all out to complete his run in such a fantastic time but he also managed to raise **£3,000**. This was a weekend to remember, because on the day before the race he attended his best friend's wedding. On the Sunday he ran the Marathon. And, a day later, his partner Sam gave birth to their third son.

Alex said, a few days afterwards: "My time was a little bit of a disappointment to me but that's because I'm far too competitive. It was all a wonderful experience and the atmosphere was at times quite overwhelming. It was made all the better knowing that I was raising money for a great charity. I would like to thank everyone for their kind donations. The thanks come from me and all the people at The Prison Phoenix Trust who found the generosity quite staggering and plan to put every penny to great use."



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE SPIRIT

'Spotlight on the spirit' provides prisoners, staff, and ex-prisoners a chance to share their spirituality, especially as it applies to current issues.

# Exploding with Joy

*An inmate at HMP Wandsworth reports how his yoga and meditation is helping him.*

**"My daughter came up on a visit..."**



**I**t is seven years since the last time I de-toxed and I was in prison then too. It was so difficult I did not sleep for sixty days.

I am now making a great effort to come off my methadone script and have been withdrawing slowly at 5ml per month from 60ml although I have been ill at times with pain in both kidneys and constipation. Some antibiotics helped and the pain is slowly subsiding. Once when I went to get my script, I was told I had not been written up (even though I have been getting it regularly for 15 months). I felt vulnerable because I am autistic and was frightened I might do something drastic to myself since I used to self harm. I felt betrayed by the Health Centre since I had told them right from the start I would need support detoxing after so long.

So with my head and heart in chaos I came back to my cell to find a large envelope on my bed from you with all the books I asked for. Your letter gave me so much encouragement and love I was able to re-evaluate the situation and sat down, there and then, and did my breathing exercises for 15 minutes. Afterwards I could see my insecurities and emotions for what they are.

So since then I have been waking up early each morning and spending an hour

and a half doing my breathing meditation. It helps relieve the pain and keep it at a bearable minimum. Meditation helps me overcome my apprehensions too, keeping me focused on the positive outcome my commitment will bring me. I long to be totally drug free by my birthday on August 5th when I am 57.

I'm keeping my mind busy with my braille programme and have just received a certificate of Proficiency in Braille which I'm very proud of. It reminded me that when I first came to prison here I was all over the place, depressed, ignored by my family and I wrote to you for help. I thought the exercises would help as I am semi-disabled after losing the back of my right knee in a motor-bike accident and also had the main carotid artery in my neck slashed by a broken bottle.

### Started listening

At first it was hard to get into the positions you recommended so I did as you suggested and used cushions and a chair and was gentle with myself. I started listening to my breathing and getting into the flow and it is totally transforming my life. I believe I am finally becoming more spiritually mature.

After three years silence my daughter

not only started communicating with me but came up on a visit. I thought I would explode with joy. She has given me one last chance to be her Dad and I believe God has answered my prayer and given me blessings beyond my wildest expectations.



**Thanks, Yvonne...**

**From HMP Grendon**

It was interesting to read in the latest newsletter the article by Yvonne, the Quaker chaplain here at HMP Grendon, writing about how she became a Quaker. I would like to say thank you to Yvonne because if it wasn't for her I don't know where I would be. I too have gone from religion to religion not knowing or finding peace until I became a Quaker and began sitting in silence. I now have peace and harmony where before I had frustration and disquiet.

# Please Be Seated



By Kate

**D**o you sit up? Or sit down? In a healthy, relaxed sitting position you can do both! Although you may usually flop into a seat without thinking - slumping or leaning back for comfort - see how much sharper your senses become when you sit like this:

- Choosing a firm seat or stool, sit down solidly so both legs are supported and your feet rest flat on the floor.
- With your lower half settled, your upper body supports itself, and you can sit up straight without effort.
- Your spine is erect and your head perfectly balanced, with the chin level.
- Release all the tension from your body, starting with your face and shoulders and letting go right down to your feet.
- Notice that even though your spine and neck are straight, you can still be totally relaxed.
- Breathe easily and naturally through your nose, and let your attention rest on your breathing.

If you usually slump, it might take a week or two for your back to strengthen, but keep at it! Research shows that if your posture is good, then your mood lightens too. Your lungs can expand freely, your nervous system is balanced, and your digestion will improve as well. Slump down and you're more likely to feel downhearted and low.

You sit all the time, but when you pay attention to sitting you can really enjoy how pleasurable it is. Taking a little break reveals that the world is full of everyday noises which start to sound clearly. If you are listening to the water boil for a cup of tea, hear the sounds as acutely as you can. Listen...

Just sitting... listening... just waiting for the water to boil for tea. Three simple acts but each one can fill the universe. No wonder Hakuin wrote the poem on this page which starts with the word: Happiness!



We're all chewing on the same thing

## BAIL HOSTEL YOGA

**There are now three bail hostels offering yoga classes - in Oxford, Tulse Hill and Catford. Next month there will be two more, when we give some taster workshops in other London locations. Since we announced our bail hostel work several Approved Premises have been in touch with us. We are trying to see that those who've been helped by their yoga and meditation in prison have a chance to continue with a teacher on release.**

‘Happiness! To sit leaning  
Against the pillar  
With congenial friends,  
And hear the clink of cups!’

- Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku  
(1686-1768)

*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**

