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

www.theppt.org.uk



Newsletter, Winter 2016

Season of Hope

Believing that things are going to be okay – or just believing that you yourself are okay - is not easy. So many things about prison can make it easy for you to feel

hopeless. But many people still find a sense of hope, which gives them energy to carry on, even if it's hard at times. Where does this sense of hope come from? Feeling safe and being able to trust the people around you helps. And we all know, whether it's the giving or receiving end we've most recently been on, that when you take time to listen to other people and affirm them as fellow human beings, they are more likely to discover a sense of hope.

But even in those times and places when safety, trust and affirmation are missing, people manage to be hopeful. Maybe you feel your prison isn't supporting you, and makes it hard for you to have hope. You are not alone. But you would also not be alone in pulling a trick of hope from your sleeve, by training your mind and heart to be in the present. It is this simple but difficult approach, made easier with meditation and yoga, that has helped so many people in prison and in other demanding situations find hope for what lies ahead.

A friend in Eastwood Park prison once said that she found hope by turning a negative into something constructive. She wrote, "Being confined in a low stimulation environment can be used as a good spiritual tool." In her isolated situation, she said she couldn't get caught up in external distractions, so she began meditating and reading more, making peace with silence and feeling calmer. (She was grateful for the library too.)

Many other people in prison say that even after learning of a heartless bureaucratic decision, something in them remains



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. buoyant. Sometimes those decisions need fighting and changing. But often, as unfair and arbitrary as they are, there is simply nothing that can be done. Hope can arise even then.



A Christmas card design from HMP Cardiff

،X÷

Naturally bright

In these situations, hope hasn't arisen randomly. Rather, it shows up when you regularly spend time allowing your mind to become still and focussed in meditation and yoga. As the part of your mind that you are familiar with - the active, thinking mind is allowed to rest, another part of your mind comes forward. That mind is naturally bright and radiant, like the sun, and it's begging to break through the clouds of your mind. Worry, fear, habitual thinking, planning, analysing, fantasising - these are the clouds that meditation helps dissolve. The thinking, controlling mind will start to slow down; this is the cloud cover getting lighter. As the sun gets stronger, you start seeing possibilities instead of dead ends. You notice beauty where previously all was grey. Where nothing had seemed worth your attention before, you are open

to being awed, or at least interested in what's going on.

On one hand, it doesn't make sense that you could ever feel hopeful in your own personal winter, when your situation is so bleak or unbearable. But somehow – in a way that's difficult to describe – things do get easier when you repeatedly bring your attention back to your breath, away from all the mental activity that surrounds your situation.

This Christmas time, and all through the winter, know that we are sitting with you in hope. Don't worry if hope only feels like a weak winter sun right now. You are inviting it in each time you sit down to meditate. It's here already actually, clouds or no clouds.



⁶⁶Hope is being able to see that there is a light despite all of the darkness.⁹⁹ ~ Desmond Tutu, Archbishop of Capetown b.1931

Check out the yoga and meditation column each month in Inside Time and tune into our radio programme 3 times a week on National Prison Radio.

From **HMP Winchester**

or

more than 30 years I was a soldier in a tough Scottish regiment. In most

aspects of work we did everything at double time. We ran everywhere and the spirit of competition was encouraged and most things were treated as a challenge. Now in my twilight years my body has worn down. I have osteoarthritis in both hips and a prolapsed disc.

Due to my unfit and injured body state, I have to slow everything I do. I now walk with the aid of two sticks and find it painful at times.

The physio in Winchester Hospital gave me exercises to do. These were doing me no good at all. They were keeping my body mobile but they were not pushing me in any way. I felt I was just fading away. I went to my GP here in the prison and asked him if yoga would do me any harm. He said it would be good for me as long as I did not overdo it.

When the classes were advertised on our wing noticeboard, most of the prisoners laughed at the thought, saying it was a girlie thing. When the classes started most of the inmates went just to spend time out of their cells. However, after a few weeks the numbers dwindled. I think the novelty wore off and the tough guys didn't find it easy. They left. There are a number of inmates that now regularly attend and are willing to try and advance their yoga skills.

My first session, I treated with caution. However, the exercises were not difficult but the relaxation and calm exercises (wow) were fantastic. I left that class as though I had no cares in the world. I try and push my body to do more, and find that most of the pain I have is all in the mind. I respect what my body tells me as I'm not a young thing anymore, but I refuse to become a cripple. I continue to do my exercises in my cell. I get a great deal of relief from my relaxation.

I feel that the thought process is just as important as the physical. It's so important to be at peace.

I have now become a person of peace and tranquillity, whereas before I took everything at face value. I now look for

the good in people and apply everything I have been taught in yoga classes. Peace, calmness and the ability to understand other people's problems. There are always people worse off than myself. Thank goodness for meditation.

My wife of over 30 years has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and COPD. She is in a hospice where she gets comfort from friends and family. Just over a year ago, my youngest daughter (step-daughter) was told she had terminal cancer. However, she is in remission at this present time. Thank God. My yoga has helped me through this stressful time and without it I don't think I could cope. I don't know if Judy, our mentor, is aware of my personal situation but she has brought me through the last six months with peace and understanding. Bless her.

From **HMP Parc**

7 our newsletter couldn't have come at a better

time! I was doing so well but I've let everything slip these last few weeks.

It's like I'm two different people - the person I am on the wing, and the person I really am when I'm on my own in my cell. I don't like the person I am when I'm on the wing with the boys. But that person seems to take over so easily and drag me from the good person I know I am. It's like I'm always fighting myself, I'm finding it so difficult to motivate myself to meditate and stuff, I've got every good intention but can't seem to put it into practice.

But today someone started talking to



Prisoners'

me about deep things, where I'm going in life, my beliefs and basically pointing the path back out

to me without me even asking. It's like deep down he could see or sense that I was lost. Then your newsletter came and I knew it was all a sign. The world works in mysterious ways and I'm sensitive to these signals!

Sorry this letter's a bit depressing, I guess I'm just offloading a lot of this bottled up stuff. I just want to be able to be this me wherever I go and whoever I'm with.

From **HMP Foston Hall**



recently received your autumn newsletter, which I read. I have been in prison for one year now (first arrest, first sentence) and, until now, was unaware of your Trust.

y pad mate has

Since being in prison I have developed a renewed interest in all aspects of fitness. I managed to get a job as a gym orderly and threw myself into the exercise programme offered. Prior to this I had absolutely no interest in yoga or relaxation. One of our gym instructors was undertaking a yoga course and began to incorporate it more into the daily programmes. I reluctantly tried what I believed to be a boring and mundane form of exercise and I was shocked at my reaction to it. I started to feel the benefits of the session immediately. Muscles that are often overlooked were worked



Christmas card design from HMP Ranby

Letters



and felt invigorated. The most astounding effect was that I felt as though the week's stresses had

been drawn out of me. I felt rejuvenated and relaxed. I immediately wanted to learn more and the officer was happy to share her knowledge with us. She also taught us, in time, more advanced stretches that were not part of the set programme. I was hooked! I borrowed books from the library and created my own programmes which I practised daily in my room. I recently spent a month behind my door and believe that my daily yoga helped it pass without incident. I am currently reading up on pilates. Meditation features in both yoga and pilates and I would like to explore this.

After reading your newsletter I realise that many people in prison are benefitting, massively, from yoga. I have spoken to the senior officer on our wing who is keen to arrange wing based yoga and meditation classes. I have applied for distance learning and would be very interested to complete any relevant courses. This is,

however, a very slow process!

From HMP Sudbury

Trecently received the book *Freeing the Spirit* and the CD from

you. I have started practising, which has helped tremendously. I gave the CD away to someone who asked for it. I thought it would help them.

The material you provide has helped me cope with being back in a Cat B prison. Being able to learn techniques that help 'dissolve the walls' is transformative to the thousands of us in such circumstances. To be honest, the gift of meditation and

Meditation Corner

yoga, something many of us have not practised, can actually be life-changing. I will definitely continue when released and will start and finish each day with yoga and meditation – like brushing my teeth.

When I first came to prison, I was very angry, especially as I was innocent of my crime. My career is gone, my son has lost his USA scholarship because I can't top up the funding now I'm in prison, my wife has had a breakdown and I received a three year sentence. The coping skills you have given to me have seen me through. I know that whatever happens, it will all be okay. Actually, I have just received a letter saying the first part of my appeal has been granted. In time I will be with my family again.

Innocent or not, I'm glad I'm here now. I will leave a better man. I want to help others more and have realised that a kind action or thought to those in a dark place can mean so much; it can actually make a difference.

D^o you sometimes get so cross it just has to spill out? Even if you feel in control of anger, you probably

know of others around you who lose their temper easily. This can happen anywhere – in prison, at home, with friends, enemies, objects – the list goes on. The other day I lost it with my mobile phone and broke the screen. I was being asked to find too many things at once, the phone couldn't keep up and so I just suddenly lost my cool. I felt pretty stupid afterwards, and was not a good ambassador for meditation at the time!

But there are definitely occasions where we need to express ourselves vividly. Like a clap of thunder, or blinding sunlight, our feelings can (and should) just burst out. This is not an expression of anger, but instead our energy and vitality – a subtle difference that comes from clarity and not a place of brooding resentment. The key is to let go of feelings that keep clinging and this is where meditation can help.

For now, sit upright and perfectly still. Try to be symmetrical; both feet on the floor, hands in your lap, chest gently raised and chin in -a little like being gently

Clap of Thunder

By Jason



pulled upwards from the top of your head. This should be unobtrusive to others, and also accepting of where you are. You may find there are noises and other disturbances happening all the time, but accepting these is a part of this practice. Keep your eyes open, gently focussed on a point a few feet in front of you. Whilst focussed upon your breathing, maintain the posture and awareness of where you are. If you feel you are being disturbed this is always good to notice - but let these feelings go as you breathe out. You may find it helpful to silently count the exhalations from one to ten, and then start from the beginning again.

During this time you may have all sorts of thoughts arise. Some of these may feel so important that they keep reoccurring

> over and over. You may notice that every time a thought repeats, each reoccurrence is a memory of a previous thought. This habitual thinking is the breeding ground for anger and resentment, and so for now just let the thoughts go and return to counting the breath.

> Keep this up for fifteen minutes. Afterwards you may notice a little more tolerance of others and less need to

form judgements. If you can repeat this practice each day over two weeks, the way you express yourself will start to change. You may be surprised that meditation does not mean you are always silent with calm thoughts – it should make life more dynamic and expressive, but not angry and abusive. Think of the cries of joy (and anguish) on a football pitch, a dog barking with excitement, or the way a child expresses her needs and then immediately moves onto something else. Expressing ourselves is good for us and those around us – and arises naturally when the mind is quiet. **The Gift of Loving Kindness**



ost people who find their lives changing through meditation say it's important to just have one main practice to do; people in prison have told us that simple meditation, sitting still and focussing on the breath, helps them find real peace inside and that's of course what we're recommending. Sticking to one practice keeps you from becoming a 'spiritual magpie' who hops from one thing to the next when the first thing gets difficult. Choosing to stick with something over a long period can bring great lessons and deepen your appreciation of it, and of yourself.

Even as you stick to your main practice, there are other ways of training the mind that can support you on your way. One of these is loving kindness meditation or metta bhavana. Metta means kindness or loving kindness, and bhavana means development. This meditation helps shift vour fundamental stance towards life, the world and everything and everyone in it - including yourself - to one of kindness. This might seem like a massive leap if life hasn't treated you kindly: why does the world deserve my love and kindness? But this activity can flip things on their head: it empowers you to cultivate an inner quality that you may see lacking around you, and in so doing, provide it for yourself and for the world.

Here's how you do it:

- Sit in one of the postures on the right. Take a minute to focus on your breath and to be aware of your body, sitting here.
- After a minute, begin to wish yourself well. With each in-breath and each out-breath, see yourself sitting here, in your mind's eye, and say on the out-breath,

May I be safe and well. On the next out-breath, say to yourself, May I be free from suffering And on the third out-breath, May I live with joy and ease.

Keep doing this for two or three minutes. Don't worry if it just seems like you are saying the words, without much feeling of kindness towards yourself behind them. That will come.

• Now bring to mind someone who you like, or respect, for whom it

is easy to generate good feelings. Picture them and wish them well:

> On the first out-breath, May you be safe and well And on the next out-breath, May you be free from suffering And on the third out-breath, May you live with joy and ease.

Do this for two or three minutes.

- Next, bring to mind someone neutral, who doesn't stir up strong feelings one way or another, someone you don't have much to do with but whose path you cross from time to time. For two or three minutes, wish them well, using the out-breath and the words, as above.
- Now bring to mind someone you find difficult, with whom there's a little friction. Don't choose your number one enemy, if you have one, or someone who has made your life miserable – that can be overwhelming, though maybe in time, you find you can wish them well too. Start with someone a little easier. And wish them well using your out-breath and the words of kindness.
- Finally, with each out-breath, extend your good will and kindness to the whole prison and everyone who lives and works there, to the area outside the prison, the whole of the country, the whole world and all its human and non-human creatures, and finally to the whole universe:

May all creatures be safe and well. May all creatures be free from suffering. May all creatures live with joy and ease.

"We all are so deeply interconnected; we have no option but to love all. Be kind and do good for any one and that will be reflected. The ripples of the kind heart are the highest blessings of the Universe."

Put your right foot on your left thigh, then

Meditation Postures

your left foot on your right thigh. Switch sides each time you sit.

Full Lotus



Half Lotus



Pull your right foot in close to your body and then place your left foot on your right thigh. Switch sides each time you sit.

Burmese

A way of sitting with both legs bent and parallel in front of you, both ankles on the floor.



Kneeling

Kneel with two cushions or a thick rolled up blanket between your bum and your feet.



Sit up straight towards the front of the seat; don't lean on the back. Have your feet firmly planted on the floor.



- Dr Amit Ray, Indian author and spiritual master, b. 1960

Life on Release

Making the Change

From "Eric" who left prison in 2015

year after my release from a 20 year prison sentence, I am experiencing life in the world of the twenty first century, a very different world from the one I knew all those years ago. I am alone for the first time in years and I wake up each morning excited at the prospect of the day ahead; a day in which the responsibility for what happens rests with me.

My transition to life outside hasn't been entirely free of stresses and strains, nor has it been without moments when self-confidence deserted me. It was sometimes difficult to decide what to do when faced with an unfamiliar range of options. There were times when I felt vulnerable, confused, overwhelmed by my unfamiliarity with how things work in today's world.

My transition still has some way to go before I can feel fully free of the restraints of imprisonment; there are still things to be learned, skills to sharpen, but I'm settling, gradually.

It soon became obvious that some skills I took for granted had been dulled by prison life. Spatial awareness is a good example of this as the pace and variety of life outside is so very different. Sometimes I had difficulty processing information. I'd get lost from time to time failing to take notice of street signs when crossing busy roads. Then there's the art of conversation. Much as I try not to, I still hesitate before asking questions of people. After years of living in a community where intimate questions were not asked I still find it difficult to bring myself to ask people about themselves. Similarly, I still hesitate to use the telephone, feeling I am intruding. There's still something of a sense that relationships are unequal.

I found the months spent in a probation hostel after release helpful. Living there provided a sort of cocoon, shielding me from having to do everything for myself but at the same time giving me freedom to assume personal responsibility and make choices. Those months gave me the time and space I needed to adapt to a different way of life at my own pace; they provided time for a kind of osmosis to take place in which all manner of new experiences could be absorbed and stored for future reference. The adventure of walking in streets full of people; the pleasure



"The adventure of walking in streets full of people..."

of conversation with strangers; the enjoyment of sitting in a cafe soaking up the atmosphere around me; the delight of rummaging in a junk shop finding things that reminded me of happier times; the excitement of searching for and buying new clothes; the self-consciousness of using a debit card for the first time to make a purchase; these feelings are difficult to capture in words.

Not alone

When the time came for me to leave the hostel and take on the tenancy of a small property I felt a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Living in the hostel had shielded me from many of the issues of self-management. I'd taken a lot on board in the last months but now it was time to paddle my own canoe.

That was a sobering realisation. For the first time in many years I was going to be living alone, taking full responsibility for my life. But, of course, I'm not alone. I have the support of friends, people I've known for a long time. Importantly, they are people who know my background and from whom I hold no secrets. I owe all of them a great deal because without their support this transition would have been a very different experience. The professionals involved my transition, hostel and probation staff, have been supportive too.

It is worth noting that in the weeks before I started my ROTLs (Release on Temporary Licence i.e. "Homeleaves") we discussed the question of support following release. I was able to present my manager with a list of names and addresses of friends and they were formalised as my support network. Their presence became an accepted part of ROTL itinerary - a rota was prepared which ensured that I was almost always able to see one of these friends when I was at the hostel. The coordinator of the support group was allowed to speak at the parole hearing which recommended my release and members still maintain contact with me.

Other men who have made the transition have been less fortunate, particularly those without either family or friend. I know many of them personally but am discouraged from maintaining contact. Having lost touch, with no way of knowing how they are faring, I can only wish them well. Thinking of them prompts me to hope that the Ministry of Justice will look hard at the schism existing between their rhetoric and the practice of rehabilitation as experienced by many ex-prisoners.

This article was originally published in the Quakers in Criminal Justice newsletter, and is reprinted here with the author's permission.



Winter Puzzles



Many thanks to Roger Squires, who provided us this cryptic crossword. Roger sets crosswords for *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. This is a tricky one. Answers are on the back page. Good luck!





In this wordsearch, how many festive words can you find? We think there are 20.

To the right is a sudoku - fill it in so that each row, each column and each of the nine boxes all contain the numbers from 1 to 9. See if you can crack the code!

Across

- Weather may be, but greetings aren't at this time (6)
- 4. Mince pie man? (8)
- 9. How one danced at the party when not quite sober? (6)
- 10. Footwear for those on ice? (8)
- 12. Takes the fare? (4)
- Common vehicles having winter fodder on board (5)
- 14. Guide to Bethlehem (4)
- 17. Their Christmas gifts were original (5,4,3)
- 20. Making a tidy packet before Christmas (4,8)
- 23. A character that may convey a greeting at Christmas (4)
- 24. Regal sort of drink for a party (5)
- 25. Reindeer tail cut to a point (4)
- 28. He's a card perhaps in party games (8)
- 29. Nursery ones are busy at this time (6)
- 30. First name in a Christmas Carol (8)
- 31. Present day indications that donors can't make up their minds? (6)

Down

- 1. It offers various penalties in party games (8)
- 2. A musical advance? (8)
- 3. Form of decoration that has grown over the years (4)
- 5. Naturally, they add colour to the decorations (5,7)
- 6. He essayed to be a leader of the church (4)
- 7. Puts up the tree, perhaps, in a secret way (6)
- 8. Leave some pudding we hear (6)
- 11. Revises match, perhaps, for December 24th (9,3)
- 15. Information that is found in Arabian Nights (5)
- 16. Piles of presents, perhaps, out of shape (5)18. Chop up a bird that's cooked and eaten at Christmas (5,3)
- 19. Extremely self-conscious persons (8)
- 21. One result of eavesdropping in winter (6)
- 22. Decorated in a neat or untidy way (6)
- 26. It may be kept or eaten at Christmas (4)
- 27. He sings in seasonal tours (4)

	3			5				
	4			9		6		1
8			7					
		7		6	2	9		4
	5		9	3	1		6	
6		1	4	8		2		
					3			7
5		4		7			2	
				1			8	

Christmas Inside 💋

From HMP Wakefield

fell the festive season is almost upon us and we have been granted Quality Streets as our chocolates this year! I don't need to eat them, I just love the smell. We are busy preparing what is going to happen with the many events offered to us. I've put down to watch the concert again this year (inmates in a proper band) – sounds amazing! I've trimmed up the cell, as always. I've made an advent calendar, a Christmas tree and many paper-chains and paper lanterns - rather festive looking if I do say so myself. It's a difficult time of the year as I don't get family contact and I'm sure I'm not alone with that but we have to carry on and carry on, we will!

We've got our mince pies now and chocolate logs. There are plenty of events lined up in the chapel so we should be okay. Then it's in to next year which is my parole year so I will be working very hard to submit my representation to the parole board for hopeful release and getting back on with life outside. I would never say that being in prison has been a waste of time, far from it! It has certainly given me perspective but also not getting away from the fact of my offending. I have to remain focussed and moving forward.



Christmas card design from HMP Dumfries

The Ways You Help

any people both inside and outside of prison get in touch asking how they can help with our work. We really appreciate such good will. Here are the best ways that you can help throughout the year:

- **Developing a meditation practice.** You are benefitting the whole of creation when you put aside your normal concerns and let go more and more into silence. It's hard to say why everything in the universe benefits from your meditation... but it does.
- Sparing a moment for people in difficult circumstances. It is invaluable to hold people who are having a hard time in your heart and to wish them well.
- Sending a cheque or setting up a standing order is a great way to help for those with something left over in their weekly budget.
- **Organising a fund raising event**. However small, a fundraiser is a great way to raise not only money, but also awareness of the Prison Phoenix Trust.
- **Remembering the Trust in your will.** We're a small charity, but still need money to keep going. Thanks for anything you are already doing to sustain this work.



ur friend at HMP Woodhill has designed this year's Christmas card (144 x 103mm). The inside message is from Desmond Tutu - "Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world." You can see it in colour on our website. To order, send the form to the right 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.

Christmas Card Order Form

- Please send me _____ packs of cards at £5 per pack of 10
- I enclose a cheque payable to the Prison Phoenix Trust for £

Name_

Prison number (if in custody)_____

Address_

Postcode

I have requested that my prison send you payment



No Mat? No Problem!



Oga is infinitely adaptable. You can practise whenever and wherever you are - in bed, outside, in the gym or anywhere there's a free corner. One yoga class was even held in a prison toilet. That was the only space available that week and the students didn't want to go without it! You don't need any fancy equipment to do yoga - just your body and mind. Calm music in the background, special clothes, lots of extra equipment - these are all unnecessary. This routine is designed to be done with no yoga mat. Try it, and let us know how you get on!



Down Dog 5 breaths



Triangle 5 breaths each side



Focus on the feeling of your breath flowing in and out for 5 minutes.



High Lunge 5 breaths each side



Warrior 2 5 breaths each side



Standing Twist 5 breaths each side. Use your elbow to go deeper into the twist.



Forward Fold 10 breaths

⁶⁶Bad times have a scientific value. These are occasions a good learner would not miss.⁹⁹ ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, poet, 1803 - 1882

Across: I. Frosty 4. Shepherd 9. Reeled 10. Slippers 12. Eats 13. Shays 14. Star 17. Three Wise Men 20. Gift Wrapping 23. Card 24. Lager 25. Scut 28. Charades 29. Slopes 30. Ebenezer 31. Tokens **Down:** I. Forfeits 2. Overture 3. Tree 5. Holly Berries 6. Pope 7. Erects 8. Desert 11. Christmas Eve 15. Genie 16. Heaps 18. Mince Pies 19. Egoists 21. Icicle 22. Ornate 26. Date 27. Alto

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. 1163558



Printed by the most environmentally friendly printing process – waterless offset – using vegetable oil-based inks and 100% renewable energy on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.