

Newsletter, Summer 2016

## TURNING UPSIDE DOWN

**A** letter to the Prison Phoenix Trust written years ago has always stuck with me. The man writing is standing trial for murder in a few months' time. His solicitors reckon if he doesn't plead guilty, there's a 25% chance he'll get life for murder, a 50% chance he'll get seven years for manslaughter, and a 25% chance he'll be found not guilty and walk free. Or, he could plead guilty of manslaughter and get about five years.

All of us have faced these kind of unsolvable problems, though the details will vary. Perhaps it's a decision about health treatment, or something to do with a relationship. No one can tell us what to do at times like these, when there's no clear cut course of action leading to a best outcome. Furthermore, even our own reasoning can take us only so far, before abandoning us, answerless, not knowing.

Could it be that for a problem like this, there is actually an elegant way ahead, even though we can't see it yet? That right in the middle of the tension and heat and hell that the situation creates inside us, there is a cool spot of ease, waiting beyond our rational minds, beyond where anyone else can lead us to?

### Starting to untangle

People in prison who take up yoga and meditation tell us that this elegant way becomes a little more accessible, even as conditions seem to get worse. By turning themselves upside down, they say impossible knots start to untangle. I don't mean that headstands or shoulderstands are the solution (though their benefits are fantastic!).

Instead, it is a flipping of the usual relationship of the head to the heart. Much of the time, our heads are on top, telling us

what to do, figuring everything out, going non-stop to the point of insomnia, trying to control everything. The heart, meanwhile, sits below, its rich depths undiscovered and unappreciated. But in yoga postures and in seated meditation, the spotlight moves from the head's stage-hogging hyperactivity to a more calming part of ourselves: the body and the breath. Initially, switching the spotlight of attention like this allows thinking to calm down. Then, at some point, you start to see that you don't have to be pushed around by thoughts, and a way of being guided by something deeper inside yourself comes forward. The head takes a back seat to the heart, whose profound power has been cultivated by tuning into the breath with practice and commitment. The head can act in service to the heart, which sees the bigger picture in a way without words.

Practising meditation is about breaking the habit of a lifetime and listening to the silence of your heart and trusting **THAT**, not the chatter of your mind. It's a hard practice, but it's worth it, because it becomes possible in hellish situations to be okay saying, "I simply don't know what to do." Then the impossible knots of your life can start to untangle themselves, aided by you immersing yourself in your breathing in meditation each day. And all the while the solution to that one intractable problem doesn't present itself, don't worry: it may just be improving as you wait.



Finding a new perspective in one of the PPT's weekly classes



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

**“If my heart could do my thinking, and my head begin to feel, I would look upon the world anew, and know what's truly real.”**

~ Van Morrison, singer-songwriter b. 1945

### 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.

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From  
HMP Liverpool

**You introduced me to yoga/ meditation and sent me CDs and books.** All

powerful stuff which has helped me no end to cope with my sentence. I even started leaning towards Buddhism, but hit a brick wall as there's no Buddhist representative here at Liverpool.

Well, time was ticking along nicely and daily I was understanding more of the simplicity of achieving a healthy mind/body by doing little bits of gym and looking forward to bang up every night to do my yoga and meditation. I work as the wing Shelter rep. dealing with housing and debt issues for other prisoners. I like to be of use to others, while building up some good karma in the process.

Then the wing bully (or one of them) who has eight inches and three or four stone on me decided because of my quiet private and gentle persona he could take some of my belongings. I am less than three years into a life sentence for taking the life of someone who tried to bully me so my reaction was fight rather than flight. No biggie, a bit of fisticuffs and like all bullies, when he realised I would retaliate has kept his distance. My issue was/is the disturbing thought process this left me with. At first toward this bully, then with any sort of disagreement, I would catch myself thinking bad intentions. At one point even considering arming myself. Thankfully, I would catch a hold of myself before acting anything out. The thought process was pretty unsettling and I ended

up thinking, "Fuck all that yoga shite. It's alright developing a peaceful caring ethos out there, but in prison where arseholes pounce on any sign of weakness, no. I fear bullies and they sense that fear." Not realising it's a fear of me losing the plot and ending up with another corpse on my conscience to attack me in my nightmares. I dealt with this by not going to the gym or doing yoga and getting stoned whenever the opportunity arose. I haven't been a happy bunny of late.

Then last week out of boredom I got my yoga CD out again. And hey, I feel a lot clearer, calmer and better again – better than any spice could make me feel. Already my sleep is coming back, and not drug induced. And my mental foes from slumberland seem to have run out of fuel. I ain't saying it's an overnight success, but Rome wasn't built in just a few shifts. Those thoughts are a lot rarer and being nipped in the bud and my sense of humour is coming back. It also felt good saying no to the spiceman at the weekend. I feel I have to go over old ground to get back to the internal/external place I was, but I enjoyed the journey last time so why not again?

Thank you for giving me the tools and knowledge to recognise the simple obvious path to my wellbeing hasn't left me, but the other way round. I see now it's all building blocks.

We have been on lock down much of this last week as gang wars rage on some of the wings. This has left me with plenty of time to sit in meditation, which has me feeling quite content internally while complete chaos rages all around.

From  
HMP Littlehey

**Since I have been at Littlehey I have been to yoga classes every week.**

These are incredibly enjoyable. They are so different to any other gym session. They are relaxing but also de-stressing. I had never done any yoga prior to coming here and it is something that I am keen to continue when I am released from prison as I have found it to be so useful.



# Prisoners'

From  
HMP Dartmoor

**Your inserts in Inside Time with advice on yoga and meditation over the last year since coming into prison**

**have been very useful, and your classes on National Prison Radio have been a real bonus to my Sunday.** In the last few weeks this has helped me more than I could have imagined. Keeping moving somehow helps me process my emotions. There's a difficult family court situation which is taking place currently so you can imagine how any help is useful just now.

As a Quaker and someone who has practised meditation for some time I thought I could cope with feelings and emotion. It helps to think of these as different things. Emotions as energy in motion, are healthy. When they get 'stuck' things get a little clunky for me. So, continuing yoga is much more helpful than other exercises.

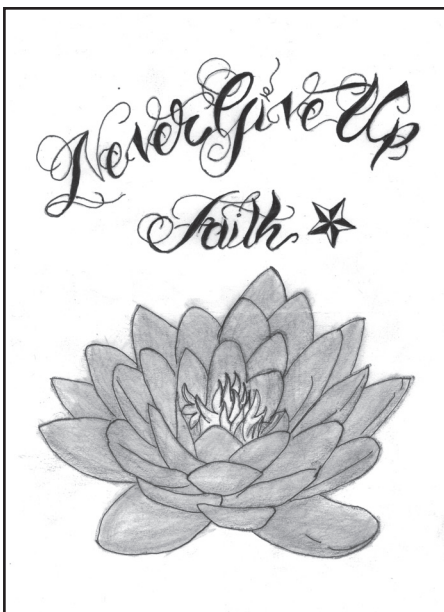
From  
HMP Glenochil

**All of us have choices, even in the most unpleasant of circumstances we still have a choice.**

I was given a life sentence in 2004, and I was nine months into it when I came across one of your books. The reading of that book was the beginning of a journey that would change the entire way that I looked at my life and the world around me. Looking back, I feel blessed to have had this chance to turn my life around through the practice of yoga and meditation.

When I step through the door of the cell I'm faced with a choice. Do I dwell in the past, wishing things were different, or do I make something of my time? Because, let's face it: time is the only gift that prison will give to you.

I have found a way to a greater freedom



Envelope art from HMP Durham

## Could You Draw Our Christmas Card?

Every year the PPT produces a Christmas card using a picture sent to us by someone in prison. If you'd like to send us your Christmas themed pictures, we'd love to see them! The winner will get two packs of the finished cards. Please send your pictures to The Prison Phoenix Trust, PO Box 328, Oxford OX2 7HF before September 1<sup>st</sup>.



# Letters

from the quagmire of prison life.

It's not an easy way to direct your life, it would be tough enough to do this on the outside. Doing yoga and meditation in prison takes real guts but it is worth it.

Yoga and meditation is the key to a peaceful life whether in prison or not, but it is not something a person does in order to gain something else. By giving 30 minutes of your day to focussed attention your life will be transformed in ways that cannot truly be expressed in words. Given long enough, it becomes a part of your life and in that process you begin to understand your life more by seeing that you are the yoga, you are the meditation, you are the meal that you eat, the tea that you drink.

*With thanks to Hazel Lynn in the Learning Centre at HMP Glenochil for allowing this article to be republished.*

From  
HMP Wakefield



**When I first came into prison a few years ago, I wondered how I would cope with all the stress**



**and challenges I would face.**

I thought I would just have to get my head around it and struggle on any way I could and hope for the best. I was searching for something to help me deal with my situation when I was introduced to yoga and meditation through a friend who had been using your CD and book *Freeing the Spirit*. He told me how much it had helped him to come to terms with being in prison and I subsequently sent for a copy for myself.

During the first few weeks of using the book and CD, I began to feel different about myself and what I wanted to do whilst in prison. I realised I had an opportunity to work on my mind, body and spirit through yoga and meditation. From those early days, my journey has been pretty amazing. Thank you for inspiring me to do something positive with my time inside.

At first some of the yoga postures were challenging, but I stuck with it and have been doing them every day for the last three years as well as attending the weekly yoga class. I can honestly say the difference it has made to my physical capability, calmness of mind and spiritual fitness has been remarkable. I have developed a totally positive perspective on

*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.*

my health and future prospects, as when your mind and body feel good, prison life does not seem so bad. Maintaining good health and wellbeing are so important, especially whilst in prison, as it helps you to stay focussed on the positives rather than the negatives. Yoga and meditation are a great way of achieving this as you can do it all in your cell, at your own pace and at your own time. Perfect.

From  
HMP & YOI Chelmsford



**I would just like to say how beneficial yoga is here.** Kurt is a good teacher. I myself have had two heart attacks and am unable to attend the gym. Kurt stresses to only do what you are comfortable with – I believe I do 75% of the class. But each and every time I go I can do a bit more. I have been attending for the past six weeks and feel it is a great benefit to my wellbeing. I'd be most grateful if this could carry on.

## Meditation Corner

# Can You See The Real Me?

**This may seem like an odd question: How would you describe yourself? Perhaps your description would change depending on who asked. Would you be the same person to an officer on your wing, the person you share a cell with, and even a member of your family?**

One of our patrons, Benjamin Zephaniah, once described how he presented himself as someone-not-to-be-messed-with when the cell doors opened each morning. Any sign of vulnerability was reserved for when he was out of sight behind his cell door. There is nothing wrong with being careful about how you present yourself, but after a while it can be hard to know who you really are – is it the hard-but-fair gangster, the geezer with a chip on his shoulder, or the model prisoner who is trying to get on with all the people on the wing? It could easily be all three and many more besides depending on who you are with.

Putting in so much effort to play these different roles, it can be easy to forget



By Jason

who we really are – and that just leads to further confusion. Try this and see if it helps you get in touch with the real you:

Sit still and upright, perfectly balanced with your ears in line with your shoulders and your chin tucked in a little. Focus on a point on the floor a little way in front of you. None of this should be really noticeable to others, but if you can find a quiet place where you are undisturbed, all the better. Keep your breathing calm and relaxed, and silently focus upon the out-breath and count one. Inhale naturally, and this time count two on the out-breath. Keep this pattern up until you reach ten, and then return to one again. You may find that thoughts or disturbances from others make you lose count. This is quite normal so just start counting from one again. See if you can keep this up for five minutes, and then feel who you are at that moment, before you start thinking who you should

be. You may find that nothing startling happens – but

somehow instead you can accept how things are a little easier at this time. If you can keep this practice going for ten minutes you are doing well.

When you meet people in prison, it is wise to behave in a way appropriate for that situation: perhaps calm and composed with other prisoners, polite to an officer, and guarded with those you do not trust. You will know what is best. But if you can get into the habit of calming the mind and focussing upon your breath, this is no longer an act – it is simply the real you, naturally expressing yourself in the best way possible.





# Three-Part Breath



By Victoria



**This three-part exercise is a great way to deepen your breathing.** It's common to breathe mainly into the upper part of the chest, but this can make you feel lacking in energy. It's also where we tend to breathe when the adrenaline kicks in and we're frustrated or feel threatened.

Deep, slow breathing helps us to feel calm and more relaxed by slowing down the heart rate and allowing the mind to be less agitated. Using the arm actions in sync with the breath we can feel different areas of the lungs being used and there's a bonus of improved mobility in the shoulder joints.

This active version of the three-part breath is safe to use every day if you're in general good health but follow the usual precautions and stop if you feel dizzy, faint or uncomfortable. Remember to be safe and work within your ability. If you have a shoulder injury, chest infection, cold or any problems breathing, wait until you're fully recovered before trying this.

Ideally, you'll have enough room to spread your arms out and above your head, but do the best you can with the space available.

## Getting Started

- Lie on your back with the knees bent, feet resting firmly on the floor with the legs slightly apart. Rest a rolled up towel or thin cushion under your head if your chin is pointing up. Bring your arms by your sides with the palms facing down.
- Let the body relax and take three deep sighing breaths (in through the nose and out 'AHHHH' through the mouth).

## Part 1 - Belly Breath

(Figures 1 and 2)

- Breathe in through the nose, raising your arms in time with the breath. The fingers point at the ceiling as the lungs are full.
- Breathe out through the nose, bringing the arms back down to your sides as the lungs empty.
- Repeat this 5 times and see if you can feel the belly expand and relax in time with your breath and arm movement.

## Part 2 - Rib Expanding Breath

(Figures 3 and 4)

- Start with your arms stretched toward the ceiling, palms facing each other. Relax the back and shoulder blades on the floor.
- Breathe in and open the arms out to each side, bringing them to rest on the floor when the lungs feel full.
- As you breathe out, lift the arms back to the start position, palms facing each other.
- Repeat this 5 times. Can you feel how the breath is more present and noticeable in the sides of the ribcage?

## Part 3 - Collar Bone Breath

(Figures 2 and 5)

- Start with your arms stretched up toward the ceiling, palms facing forward. Relax the back and shoulder blades on the floor.
- Breathe in through the nose, lowering your hands to the floor behind you.
- Breathe out, lifting the arms back toward the ceiling. Move your arms to synchronise with your breath rather than trying to fit the breath into the arm movement.
- Repeat this for 5 breaths and notice how the sensations expand into the upper chest right up to the collar bones. There's almost a sense of relief as the out breath takes the arms back toward the ceiling.

## Full Yogic Breath

Once you're comfortable with the three component parts you can try the full yogic breath. Bring it together by moving through all three arm movements on one long in breath. Start in figure 1.

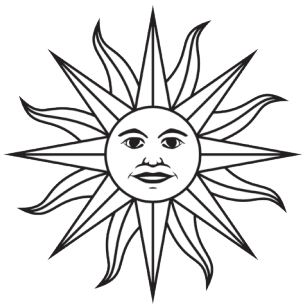
- The first third of the in breath, the arms lift to the ceiling (figure 3).
- On the second part of the in breath, the arms move out to the sides (figure 4).
- Sweep the arms along the floor as the lungs fully expand (figure 5).
- Exhale slowly, bringing the arms overhead and back down to the sides.

This is a real test of synchronising your arm movements with your breath, so take some time to practise and it will all come together! Move the arms quicker if you run out of breath. Over time you will notice your lung capacity improves and the arms won't feel rushed.



**"Breath is life. We should pay as much attention to it as any other aspect of beingness."**

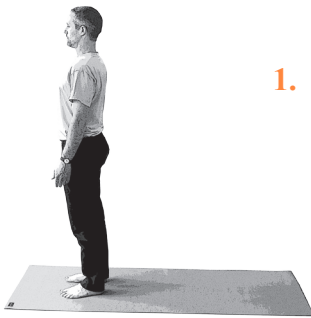
— Swami Nostradamus Virato



# Saluting the Sun

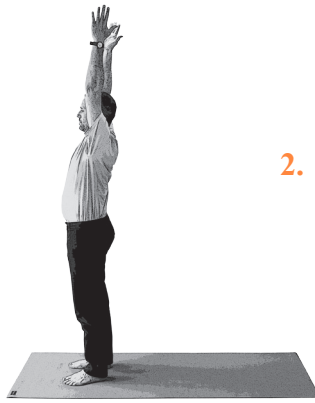


By Lucy



1.

*breathe in*

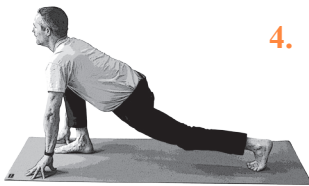


2.

*breathe out*



3.



4.

*breathe in*



5.

*hold breath*



6.

*breathe out*



7.

*breathe in*



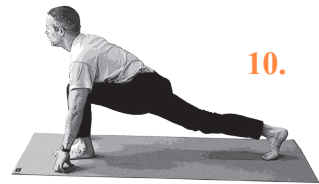
8.

*breathe out*



9.

*breathe in*

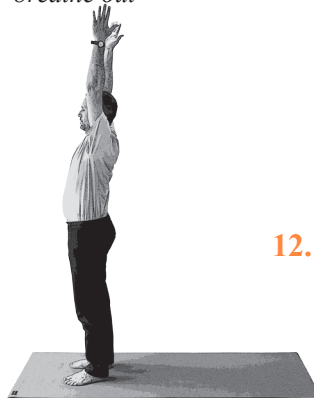


10.



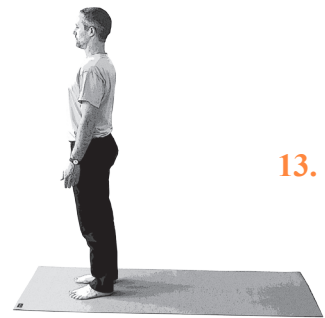
11.

*breathe out*



12.

*breathe in*



13.

*breathe out*

**The Sun Salutation wakes up the whole body.** Because of this, it's great to do in the morning, or any time you need energy. This sequence will stretch and strengthen all the major muscle groups, as well as provide cardiovascular exercise. More importantly, it can make you feel calm, clear and in touch with your body.

Let your in breath and your out breath guide your movements. For example, breathe in as you leave position 1 and start lifting the arms slowly up into position 2, and then breathe out as you move from there into position 3. Don't worry if you don't immediately get the hang of the breathing. Just enjoy it, and be aware of your breath.

What's shown above is half of one round. For the first half of each round, the left leg steps back into position 4, and it steps forward into position 9. For the second half of each round, it is the right leg that leads. Start with six rounds. In time you can build up to more. Some people do 12 or 24. Traditionally, this routine is done facing the sun. That might not be possible in your cell, but if you ever get the chance to do yoga outside, this is a great routine to try.

The sun salutation can be a complete yoga sequence in itself or a building block in a longer practice. Try adding your favourite yoga poses after you've done it - listen to your body and work out what feels good to you. Enjoy!







# So Simple, So Brilliant

## From HMP Albany

**I**'m coming to the end of a very stressful, thought provoking and hard soul searching program – but so rewarding and enlightening. I feel like I have been released and am now starting to understand the real, better me.

I first started using yoga and meditation as a coping strategy but now I use it to understand myself and to start my day off in a relaxed and helpful way.

Due to having a painful trapped nerve in my back I have had to stop the yoga and instead have done a lot of meditation. I must have counted millions of breaths! The letter you sent me when I was struggling to meditate really helped. You said to just let the thoughts run their course and not fight them. Things have become a lot more clear, less muffled with everything crowding in on each other. Instead I have a feeling of letting the thought go and just breathing instead. I have achieved what I call my blank spaces, where for a few seconds the only sensation is the slight tingling as I slowly go around my body. The fingertips are best – after I've taken my awareness all the way down my arm and into my hand it's almost as if they're shouting, "My turn now!"

### Useful Tools

I've been through the Sex Offenders Treatment Programs in here – both Core and Extended. After some very stressful days I get back to my cell and sit and breathe to calm myself down. Before I start to really relax I let all my thoughts have free reign – I don't try to stop or block any of them and let my brain examine as many as I can. They slowly become less urgent. That's when I can start my breathing, calming it, feeling it and enjoying it.

One of the things that really made me sit up and take notice was that I had



**Brean Downs - precious moments and memories**

high blood pressure. The doc put me on an automatic blood pressure machine that took a reading every 15 minutes for 24 hours. When the results came back I noticed something amazing. While I was doing my morning meditation my heart rate had slowly gone down and bottomed out at 37 beats a minute! I asked the doctor and that was healthy. I didn't realise, but that 15 minutes in the morning was loading me up with everything I needed to get through the day.

This week coming is the final part of the course. I've taken and understood so much from it that I've become an Interventions Peer Mentor and now help others – something the old me would never have even dreamed of. I keep hearing this word "karma" and maybe there's something to it.

I should be leaving the Isle of Wight in the next couple of months and the next stage of the sentence is going to start. My more open attitude is going to help me through it, and backing that up and supporting it is my meditation session in the morning. There, my mind, body and, yes, my soul, have their time. I now understand what is meant when someone says "love yourself".

I haven't had a visit for three years. I've missed my family like mad but hopefully if I get moved to Birmingham and get a visit I'll be able to introduce this me to them – it's going to be awesome. That's if they don't walk past me in the waiting room... When I came in I was 21 ½ stone. With getting my mind positive I packed in smoking, reversed my diabetes, got

rid of my high cholesterol, halved my blood pressure medication, came off anti-psychotics and anti-depressants and I'm now 13 stone. Yoga has been a massive part of these achievements. I have less than two years left and when I step through that prison gate I'll have some very helpful tools in my back pocket.

### Hippy Grandad

I keep thinking about my granddaughters and their "You turned into a hippy, grandad?" response. You never know, I might have two little converts on my hands because I WILL introduce them to meditation. My daughter is a female me – she can and does fight the world, and will win every time when the temper, anger and rage are let go. This has been passed down to the girls. So maybe a hippy grandad might have another way of dealing with that anger – after all it was originally MY anger.

There's been a picture in my head that's helped me through some hard times in here of me, my daughter and the girls outside the caravan in Brean watching the sun go down. We used to do that before. I want that time again, but this time I'll have a better understanding of it and will realise how precious those moments and memories are. The meditation I've learnt has helped me with that because I've been back there on many occasions. That's because you told me not to fight thoughts if they come into your mind – give them your time then just let them go. So simple, so easy, so absolutely brilliant.



# A Helpful Life

By Pete White

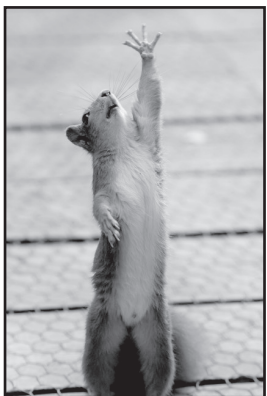


Dear Prison Phoenix Trust,

I am getting in touch much much later than I ever planned to... but life has been quite a roller coaster in the ten years since I left HMP Edinburgh. Whilst I have been able to make occasional small donations to the Trust I have not shared anything of my time and journey from first coming across you in August 2005 as a short term prisoner rightly convicted of embezzlement.

This is embarrassing because the Friday afternoon yoga sessions formed a key part of my personal discovery and recovery of my self and introduced me to an understanding of how life can be calm and constructive in prison and, as it turns out, beyond the walls. My daily practice has ebbed and flowed since release but this is better than being non-existent!

My first session inside found me with maybe a dozen people from different parts of the prison sitting on the floor of a stark bare room with our teacher, John, a flower and a candle. He talked very quietly but clearly about what was on offer in the space and time we would have whenever we met together. The possibility of calming body and mind was both novel and remarkable given where we were. We were guided through a gentle warm up and into some equally gentle postures and introduced to awareness of our breathing. This all led into meditation – an exercise which stunned me in the nicest possible way. Sitting in silence with the sole intent of quietening my mind brought me to the realisation that I hadn't stopped to think much in my life up to that point. I'd always been in pursuit of something that was beyond my reach. To find that the calm and clarity I'd



Beyond my reach...

been chasing so hard could be found in such simple circumstances inside a prison was something of a revelation. On my return to my cell I fell into what felt like the deepest and

best sleep I'd ever had.

After a couple of weeks and receiving your *Freeing the Spirit* book I started my own daily practice in my cell in the early quiet each morning. I was lucky I was in a single and with some care, it was possible to stretch out on the floor. Over the months that followed my body and mind found a state of peace and clarity previously completely unknown. These dawn sessions were the cornerstone to each day.

## The Commitment

Before release I privately committed myself to being helpful for the rest of my life, not knowing what this would entail or even if it was possible. Since then I have worked almost exclusively in the voluntary sector on projects seeking to alleviate disadvantage in Scotland. Through this work I found that I could raise funds (legitimately!) for some of these projects. When, about five years ago, I first met one of the big charitable trusts in Scotland as part of an application for almost £50,000 I explained at the very start that I had spent time in prison for embezzlement and that if this was an issue I would leave before I even sat down. To my surprise this offer was met with the kindest response I had encountered – 'How was your time inside?' I explained that it had been surprisingly positive. We then talked about the project I'd come in to discuss and after this was over (yes, we did get the funding) I was encouraged to go and think about how I could put this positive experience to good use.

Now, five years on from that conversation, I am looking after **Positive Prison? Positive Futures**, a peer led Scottish charity I set up which seeks the recognition of people with convictions as citizens. We contribute to the improvement of Scotland's justice system to reduce the harm caused by offending and to bring about changes in public opinion to support the integration of people who are, or have been, subject to punishment. We are making a difference based on our collective lived experience. For example, following our meeting over two years ago with the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill, over two years



Pete White

ago it is now possible for prisoners to be released from Scottish prisons one or two days before the end of their sentence if this might improve their opportunities for rehabilitation. Given that there are over 10,000 liberations from Scottish prisons every year and that approximately 40% of these fall on Fridays there is now potential for a great many people to make connections on vital issues such as housing, wellbeing and benefits without having to deal with the yawning chasm of a weekend between release and these connections being made. We are working on many other issues relevant to people in and who have been in prison.

None of this would have come about if I had not been introduced to yoga and meditation by the Prison Phoenix Trust in HMP Edinburgh. Thank you for making it possible for me to do something useful with my life.

Yours aye,

Pete – no longer a number!

For those who can access the internet please visit [www.positiveprison.org](http://www.positiveprison.org)



# We Never Sit Alone



*Many people, whether they are serving a prison sentence or not, struggle with self-esteem. In this exchange of letters between Dave and John, we see how easy it is to give yourself a hard time and how regular meditation can help.*

Hello John,

I'm trying to get my head around a 7½ year sentence. It's getting a bit easier to accept. My mum now 82 is finding this one hard and thinks she has lost me for ever. She is one of the most warm-hearted people you could ever meet.

Everything happens for a purpose so I'll have to make some positive things happen. Recently I've been thinking like that a lot, but I always make plans that are destined to fail and when they do, I punish myself and feel worthless. But if I do something good, a painting, a poem, a good turn, or save a life, I hide it or deny I have anything to do with it. But if it goes wrong, everyone has to know. My self esteem is terrible.

What's wrong with me? I can't take praise or reward, keep feeling shit, worthless, and excel under stress and negative criticism yet I always hide my true thoughts, feelings and emotions. I also isolate myself as often as I can. The outsider, the odd one out. Why do so many people hate me and want to inflict violence on me just because I am different? Why can't I find peace outside myself in society?

I share a 8 x 12 foot with an inconsiderate with a hygiene problem who lives for gangster rap, soap operas, sex and drugs, is extremely frustrating and it's all too much thinking it's going to be like this for the next three to five years. God. Give me peace. I can't handle much more of this.

I had a father who ignored me and mentally abused me, always putting me down, a bully and coward. Yet mom was kind, loving and wonderful. I was violently abused by another man at nine. And school was hell, always being tormented to the point of attempting suicide.

I'm so in touch with the beautiful earth and I have done so much for animal care, tree planting, bird and butterfly conservation, waste limitation, recycling and I put my love into it all.

Now, I'm 50 and with a heart condition I don't think I'll last much longer. So, why has it been like it has? And how can I use the rest of my life?

I have never written a letter like this before and you are the only people outside I get a letter from.

With love,  
Dave



Dear Dave,

It must be very hard for your Mum, but she still has you to write to. She obviously loves you to bits and you will no doubt send her equally comforting letters. If she can keep you in her thoughts and you do the same, it is as though you are one, which you are. You started with the devastating news that you have to do 7½ years, but despite this you managed

to remember your love for the natural world. I think that many sensitive people consider themselves to be outsiders; but we are all part of a whole, and the more we explore our spirituality, the clearer that becomes.

I see how you keep reaching for good when life has dealt you such a hard hand. You look for peace even in a 8 x 12 foot with a difficult roommate.

You mentioned self-esteem. The best way I have found to build self-esteem is to meditate. I cannot really explain why, but when you sit in meditation, you are not trying to achieve anything. You're not trying to be better or good. You are giving yourself some real quality time, pausing to tune into the universe as a whole and listen to the quiet. Perhaps you will try it and let me know what you hear. Because although there are doors slamming, people shouting, ghetto-blasters blasting, there is still that quiet to be found within yourself.

Just focussing on the breath leaves little or no room for all the other noises and distractions and that lets all that stuff, which makes us think we need to be better, just drop away. The real stuff gets a chance to manifest itself and to show that the real Dave is just perfect! Try it for yourself and discover this. I will be sitting with you. It's nice to know that when anyone of us sits, we never sit alone.

Love,  
John



**“As a body everyone is single, as a soul never.”**

*~ Hermann Hesse, Swiss poet, novelist and painter 1877-1962*

*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**

