



Newsletter, Winter 2015



THAWING OUT



I heard from a friend in Channings Wood Prison last week. He'd taken up meditation and yoga after writing to us a few years ago when his head was all over the place, wracked with guilt. He's getting out soon, and feeling confident. He wrote that he feels whole again, a different man than when he came in. He said he was on bang up all the time at the moment, but could still appreciate life just as it was. "I'm sat writing this letter and the sun is shining in my window. It's really nice :)!"

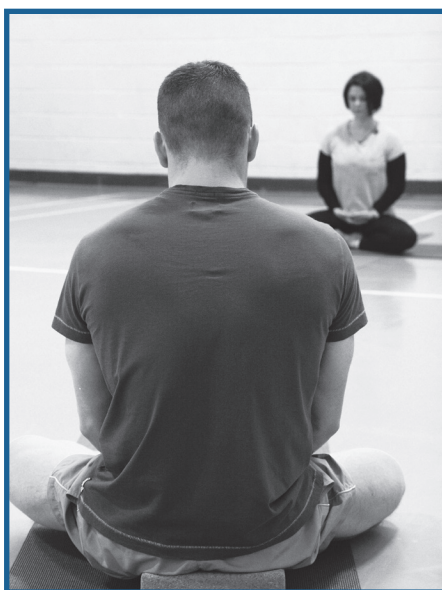
His letter and his positive self-image got me thinking about how we human beings almost always have an image of ourselves, or a way we label ourselves. Sometimes it's positive, like my friend in Channings Wood. Social scientists and psychologists know (as does anyone with a little common sense) that if you've got a positive self-image, you're more likely to be healthy, and have some control over your life.

But as most of us also know, it's possible to have a negative idea about ourselves. Journalist and former life-prisoner Erwin James said recently (see page 7) that he had always been told he was thick when he was little. He kept on believing he was stupid and slow, right into his 20s. The general public is hugely influenced by what they read in the papers, so it's easy if you're in prison to take some of the opinions in the media on board and to begin to actually feel like 'scum', a 'no-hoper' or any of the other popular labels.

Years -- or even decades -- go by, and the labels you would have resisted at one time can become internalised: a kind of frozen 'truth' about yourself.

Like my friend in Channings Wood, Erwin got support while he was in prison, and his old ideas about himself started to melt.

He discovered the joy of writing. He wound up publishing a weekly column in a national newspaper while he was still locked up! He went on to become a respected journalist, and has been working hard since his release for prison reform.



**Sharing this one breath,
in a prison yoga class**

Joining the flow

What helps this thawing, this shift in "self imagining"? Certainly having contact with people who really believe in you helps. And you need to be willing to see that who you are isn't as fixed as you had thought. Meditation and yoga can play a big role too. This means releasing tension and calming down your overactive nervous system with some postures and breathing practices, and sitting still, paying attention to your breathing for a while each day. Gradually, gradually, we discover other, positive ways of thinking about ourselves. And some days we may find that we have joined the flow of life again so much that the notion of who we are disappears, and

we respond to what's in front of us, without any great need for a me, good or bad.



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

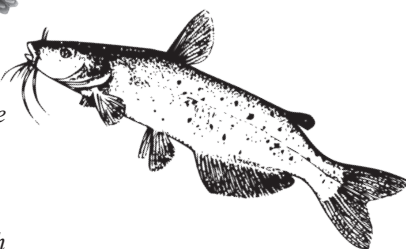


“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

~ Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist

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 a prisoner
HMP Woodhill**

August 2015

Thank you for helping me with my yoga and meditation. It's helped with controlling my anger so much.

I've gone through life just being so angry. Getting into trouble, fighting, even smashing the prison furniture, until I found your advert in *Inside Time*.

I was in a high control cell when I started using your books. It's been about a month of doing it every day, and I've gone from getting into arguments and trouble every day to being really calm, relaxed, polite to people. I feel so good in myself! Every time a situation occurs I just do some deep breathing exercises.

September 2015

Your letter really did help me as I've just had some really bad news: my nan just died of cancer. I felt like kicking off, but where would that put me? I'll tell you – in a box back to square one. But I really thought about it, because today they put me on losses on an adjudication

for something that happened two months ago. To top it up they took my TV off me. Then I got your letter, so I started to do yoga. I feel ten times better.

It's true what you say about anger just being a habit. It's like smoking – once you break the habit it's very good for you. I'm not fighting the system anymore. I'm retired.

Writing is a way of getting my anger out in a positive way. And I will keep at my yoga and meditation – just meditating on the bed alone really helps me.

I'm a Catholic and I'm also getting back into my faith. It's good to have faith in prison. It helps so many people. It's good to know someone is there for you.



**From a prisoner
HMP Wymott**

Igo to the gym a lot and am into all forms of fitness.

I've noticed that some yoga poses are similar to warm up and cool down stretches I do. Your Cell Bed Yoga handout is brilliant and I try to do it daily, but with this being a new thing I



Prisoners'

am working up slowly so I enjoy it as I learn. It will eventually be a natural routine to unwind and relax.

My sleep pattern has been bad but I've noticed the difference already. I tend to be able to go to sleep a lot easier now, and I feel less stressed and anxious. As you can understand being in prison can be a very stressful place. You have to deal with egos and people who don't want to change and are happy being "a criminal". Well, I want to change and be a better person.

I enjoy the full lotus and I was surprised how easy I got into the position. The cobbler's pose is another I enjoy. I am trying to master the full shoulder stand but can't quite get it yet. I am genuinely enjoying myself.

**From a prisoner
Bombard Phiset,
Thailand**



Every time your newsletter comes I get a new buzz. All the new suggestions, like "It's Hip to be

Meditation Corner

The Finger of Blame

Perhaps one of the toughest parts of being in prison is the way someone else makes nearly all of your decisions. I'm sure you'll agree this covers virtually everything: your cell is chosen (and probably the person you share this with); daily activities must fit into a strict regime; visit times are stipulated and your diet has limited possibilities too. Even your release date may depend on the decision of others.

Of course there are ways of challenging these decisions with complaints, applications, legal action, or just kicking off. But there is another option that is



By Jason

always available no matter how difficult you feel your sentence is.

The first step is not to blame others – for anything. There is a simple beauty to this: every time you point the finger of blame, you are reminding yourself that someone else has got the better of you. And every moment you are not blaming someone, you are freed from this bad feeling. This is a tough stance to take, but if you can refuse to become a victim by not blaming others, prison life can be transformed. But it takes practice.

Right now, forget what you've just read and just be still and upright for a short while. Do this unobtrusively, with your eyes open, inwardly focussing upon your breathing. Your breath is not a perpetrator or victim, it makes no judgement or blame – it just sustains you, effortlessly and reliably. It is normal for thoughts to keep arising as you focus on your breathing. Don't worry. Just return to the breath. You may start to blame yourself

rather than those around you. Perhaps all this was your fault? Perhaps you made the wrong decision or were just dealt bad luck from day one? Whatever you feel – even if you take full responsibility for your actions – return to your breathing again. Don't allow yourself to be the victim of your thoughts, and instead focus on the in-breath and out-breath. Everything is free from judgement and blame, no matter how we may feel. Just be sustained, and know this is all that needs to happen right now.

This may be one of the toughest things you do in prison, and so it may be easier to start small. If you can practice this for just ten minutes each day, you may gradually and quietly find yourself starting to tolerate things that previously pushed your buttons. Just forget about the cause of your problems and worries and return to the breath. If you stick with this each day for one month, over the coming months you may no longer need to point blame or feel self-pity. That's an unusually strong position, whether you are in prison or outside.



Letters

Square" breathing.

Pranayama has become a very important part of my morning practice. After yoga I love doing different breathing exercises. Getting the newsletter four times a year gives the right fresh air into my practice, so thanks a lot. After reading it I send it out to a dear friend of mine who is at the Bangkwang prison, here in Bangkok. He has followed me into the world of "freedom behind bars". We exchange letters and motivate each other. I am the only one here taking yoga and meditation seriously. Sometimes I wish I could exchange a few words with others who love doing the daily practices.

But I still have peace every day. All it takes is a small space for a great journey. That's the beauty of the whole thing, that you don't need anybody or any tools to reach this precious feeling that follows you through the day.

I always pray to be transformed daily into a better person. I have found out that this is exactly what is happening to me. God gave me yoga and meditation to grant me a wish I've been asking him for a long time.

For a guy with a sentence of 13 years, it is unusual to walk around with a smile every day.

My faith to God and the Universe has grown so much and some big changes have occurred in my dreams. For many years I would always have nightmares, but now they are gone. I don't remember the last time I dreamed something negative - all my dreams are either neutral or good. All this is proof that I'm on the right way.

From a prisoner HMP Lewes



Since I last wrote I have been to see the mental health team in the prison. Last night for the first time I tried some yoga and meditation, and I have to say I had the best night's sleep for a long time. I woke up this morning feeling a lot more relaxed and less tense. I was ready to face the day in education classes.



From a prisoner HMP Bure

I've been doing my meditation sitting on the edge of my bed. I'm now doing minutes at a time. I hope to build up to



longer, then I hope to go on to the Burmese, seiza, half lotus and full lotus, and work my way up to an hour.

I am relaxing more and my back and body are feeling a lot better. I am thinking more about how

I can change the old me to the new me and not go back to my old ways and end up in prison because I reoffended. Doing yoga has helped so much.

As I get better at meditation I will try and do a week's and month's programme, and start doing the yoga poses before I meditate. I'll let you know.

I have got a book from the library on yoga, and a copy of the Bible. I get so much help from it as I am C of E. Meditation has made my faith better and stronger.

At night I do my meditation between 9 and 10pm as the mornings are a bit of a rush, but I will try to do at least ten minutes in the morning.

From a prisoner HMP Drake Hall



Your recent newsletter was very informative and great to read. I loved the yoga bit and breathing exercises and articles. I have started doing yoga in my room with the help of the radio and the book with CD you sent me, and I love it! I used to do yoga and it's so good to have the chance to do it again.



From a prisoner HMP Wakefield

June 2015

My weight problem needed actioning, so I managed to get myself on prescription gym and weight management classes. With my extra energy from not smoking I can give the gym all I've got and am pleased to report the weight is dropping off. I'm watching what I eat and really enjoying relaxing with my meditation books.

If I can crack the weight issue along with the smoking (already done) I'll have come so far. I am even running again, doing laps around our sports field. This is all down to confidence in what I have found in myself through your books. I really do feel so confident which is refreshing as I would normally give up when it comes to diet and exercise. I really am beginning to feel free.



No longer pointing the finger of blame

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.

October 2015

Prison is so much of a roller coaster, one minute up, the next down. I'm currently very much on the up. My times of meditation have become much more relaxed than they ever were. The future's looking a lot rosier.

My family have disowned me and as much as that hurts, I have to respect their wishes. I sometimes feel so low about that but I have to keep going.

Christmas is coming and, despite being in prison, I always enjoy it. Me and a friend club together for a buffet which we prepare and invite people to come and enjoy with us. We buy little toiletry items from the canteen and wrap them up to open on Christmas day. We may not be out yet but we will do our best with what we've got. It brings tears to my eyes when I receive gifts from people at Christmas, just to say thanks for me being there for them all year.



From a prisoner HMP Wymott

The half hour yoga sessions I do on a morning before the door opens make me feel fresher and ready to face the day, calmer and more relaxed as well. I also know that if anything goes wrong I can wait until I return to the cell and then use yoga and your books to help work through whatever it was that caused the trouble instead of resorting to my old ways of coping, ways which put me in here.



Square Breathing Part II - Shaping Up Nicely

If you enjoyed the Square Breathing in the last newsletter you can take it a bit further by holding the breath for a few seconds. Here's how:

Sit comfortably in a position that you can maintain for 5-10 minutes. Sit on a chair, or the edge of your bed. Keep your back upright and the shoulders, head and neck relaxed. You can use a ticking clock as a regular beat, or count in your head.

It's important to build up to these gradually, so if you haven't practised Square Breathing Part 1, please check out our Autumn newsletter (or write to us and we will send it to you).

Rectangle Breathing with Retention

This should feel easy and stress-free (so don't over expand your lungs or hold your breath till your eyes bulge!). The breath in and out should feel controlled and smooth.

- Sit comfortably upright and rest your hands in your lap.
- Breathe in through the nose and sigh out through the mouth 3 times to



By Victoria

- relax the jaw, throat and upper body.
- Start gently using a count of 3 for the in and out breath. Use a count of 2 for the breath-holding part.
- Breathe IN gradually for a count of 3, and see this in-breath as the long side of a rectangle.
- HOLD the breath softly (ribcage expanded) for a count of 2, and imagine the short side of the rectangle.
- Breathe OUT evenly to a count of 3, visualise the third side.
- Gently, HOLD the breath out (ribcage relaxed) for a count of 2 to complete the shape.
- Take a moment to rest and breathe normally.
- Repeat the sequence 2 more times: 3 count IN, 2 count HOLD, 3 count OUT, 2 count HOLD.
- Take a short rest, notice how you feel. If you feel okay then try 2 more sets of 3 rectangles.
- Finish with 3 sighing breaths and have a stretch. You may want to sit still for a few minutes or even do your meditation practice now.

A Note of Caution

Don't do these if you are pregnant, have glaucoma, high or low blood pressure, or any form of heart condition (angina, palpitations, heart disease etc.). Practise gradually, be patient and honour your body. No need to over exert or force your breathing.

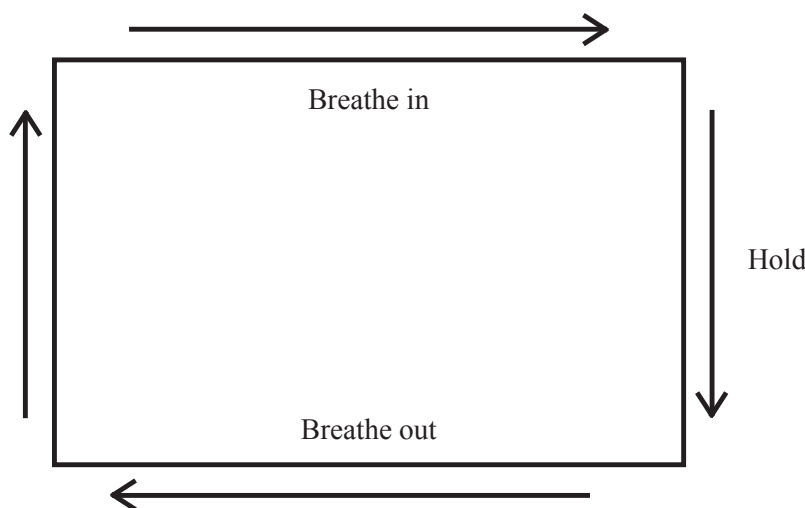
Take some time after the exercise to check in. Was your breathing practice comfortable and calm? If it was too slow then take 1 away and make the breath count shorter. If it felt too rushed or a bit light-headed, add 1 more to your count, breathing in and out for 1 extra beat each time. Don't add more than 1 beat to your original count as this will be too much exertion in one session. If you're struggling with the breath retention then reduce the Hold count by 1. Remember there's no rush!

Practise the 3:2 ratio count for up to 4 weeks or longer until it feels comfortable.

The Hold on the out-breath is usually more difficult to do comfortably so let this be your guide for when to progress.

To go further:

- First increase the in and out breath count by adding 1 (4 IN, 2 HOLD, 4 OUT, 2 HOLD).
- Next increase the hold by adding 1 (4 IN, 3 HOLD, 4 OUT, 3 HOLD).
- Practise each stage for at least 4 weeks or as long as you need to make it comfortable. Use the same breath count regularly before adding more, so that you gradually improve. You can take the breath count to a maximum ratio of 8:6 if you practise often and increase slowly.



“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky.
Conscious breathing is my anchor.”



~ Thích Nhất Hạnh, b. 1926, Buddhist monk, teacher and peace activist

Run to the Stones, Salutes to the Sun! Prison staff sweat for prison meditation and yoga

Prison Officer Chris from HMP Grendon ran 62 miles in 15 hours and 30 minutes earlier this year in The Race to the Stones, raising £535 for our work offering yoga and meditation in prison. Chris was helped in his training by the staff yoga class he goes to at HMP Springhill. A friend who saw him afterwards said he was bloody and knackered. Chris played this down two days later, saying, "The cuts and grazes are healed. I'm pleased to have been able to contribute a little to your cause." Meanwhile, Probation Officer and Prison Yoga Teacher Kate (Frankland and Low Newton) organised a Yoga Mala in the autumn, where participants completed 108 sun salutations. The proceeds of over £800 were split between The Prison Trust and The Neil Blenkinsop Foundation. We're grateful to both these caring people, who give so much in and out of prison.



Meditating during Kate's Yoga Mala

A prisoner came up to me after yoga this week – it was his first session. He told me he was a Christian and had no idea what yoga would be like, but he was encouraged to give it a go by his friend. He said, "As I was doing the yoga I was constantly reminded of The Bible's teachings – the breath of God that we are all made from."

From Cherie

Yoga Teacher at HMP Littlehey

Still Time For Christmas Cards!

Reg Zenshen at HMP Woodhill designed this year's card (144 x 103mm). The inside message is from John O'Donohue - "Now is the time to free the heart / Let all intentions and worry stop / Free the joy inside the self / Awaken to the wonder of your life." See it in colour on our website. To order, send the form to: The PPT, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF. If your prison is sending payment, 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 _____

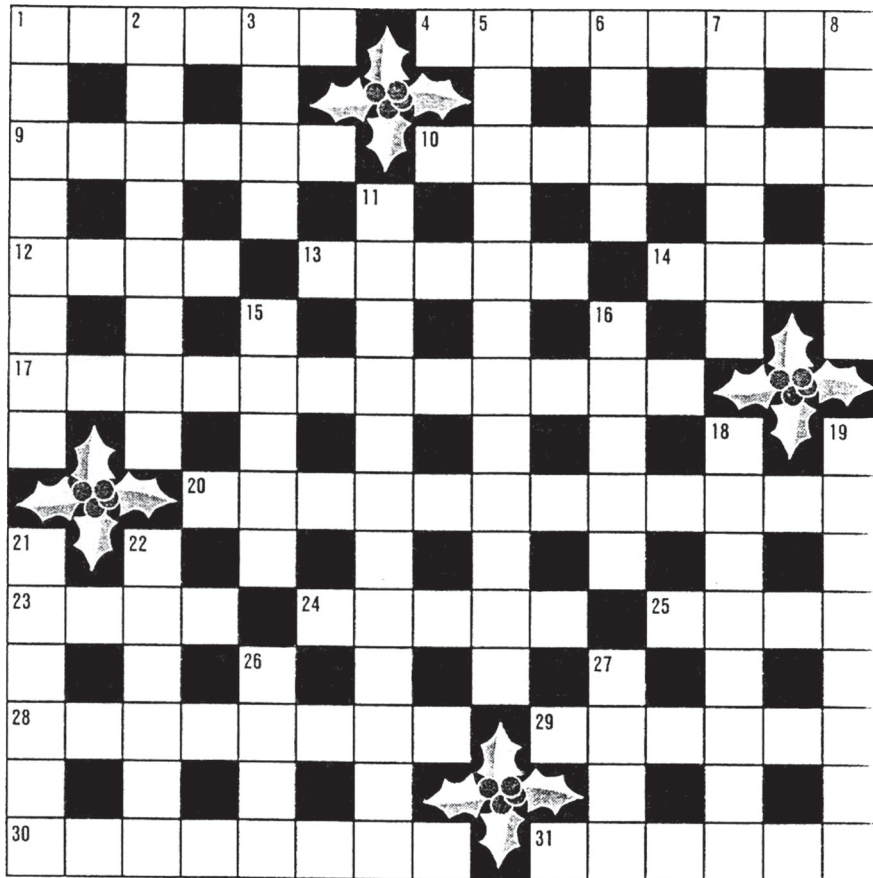
☐ I have requested that my prison send you payment



Winter Puzzles



Many thanks to Roger Squires, who provided us this cryptic crossword. Roger sets crosswords for *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Watch out, it's a tricky one! Answers are at the bottom of page 7.



Across

1. Seems a strange herb, openly used by Ali Baba in pantomime (6)
4. Distributes cards to us after sorting (5,3)
9. Like some games in party round end of December (6)
10. Very good article for cake decoration (8)
12. Number taking turns at party game (4)
13. Tree is not yet decorated, we hear (5)
14. Decorate some cards (4)
17. Boiled sweets at Christmastime? (4,8)
20. Ignored the position of the snowman (3,2,3,4)
23. What about the end of a white Christmas? (4)
24. Bar inside provides wine to party-goers (5)
25. Three wise men have a different image out East (4)
28. Popular mixture of ale and spice (8)
29. Sport has its day at Christmas (6)
30. Keen to throw drinks parties (5-3)
31. Be less reserved and untie one's present (4,2)

Down

1. Where many enjoy the pleasures of the slippery path (3,5)
2. Was partial to a punch ingredient - it won't go bang in front (4-4)
3. Humour of doctor lifts the party (4)
5. Original Christmas forecast? (12)
6. Animal will have rein on if used by Santa (4)
7. Fancied an uplifting party about the tree (6)
8. Follows footprints in the snow (6)
11. Chinese lantern used in pantomime (8,4)
15. Outlet to show displeasure after Christmas has finished (5)
16. Bird that returns in Winter, generally (5)
18. Gift for people after the party (8)
19. Calculating a pudding mixture (6,2)
21. Appear in the nude - not how skater is normally seen (6)
22. Mother picks up a good tart with the bird (6)
26. They're first-rate cards (4)
27. Boisterous party in the afternoon, or the other way round (4)



N A C E L E B R A T E J R L H U
S P R E S E N T M J V S T I O C
Y F H U B H A N U K K A H D L R
R U D O L P H V O T R N O E L R
D N M C R I J P G I F T U N Y E
R F I M L C N S H B S A T H E I
U N C A G A R I L O V E D I V N
M A W S H R S A R T P G H I E D
O I D S I O F S C O F E A S T E
D J I N G L E G O K L A V T X E
E F E O N S I Y U L E V E A L R
Y D R W I N T E R I V R I R N G

In the wordsearch above, 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!



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

Breathing and Books



In September, journalist and PPT Patron Erwin James spoke to Prison Phoenix Trust friends and supporters at our annual lecture. He was introduced by fellow Patron Jeremy Irons. Erwin warmed to his theme, "Hope Springs Eternal: Getting Prisons Right" and held us rapt as he spoke of his early life, his entry into crime, his life sentence in prison, and his thoughts on a more humane and effective prison system. We thought you might like to read this extract from his talk.



Erwin speaking at the 2015 Prison Phoenix Trust Lecture

Igave up at one stage, I thought, I don't deserve these exams, these qualifications. I was getting all sorts, I was achieving things. And that made me feel good about myself, which I hated. And I stopped my education. Joan [my psychologist] came to my cell and said, "What's all this? You've stopped your thing." I said, "Jo, I don't deserve this. Christakes, who am I trying to kid? I'm finished."

"No, you're not finished," she said. "You have choices. People outside think you don't have choices in prison, but you do. You can get out of bed, or not get out of bed. Go to the workshop, don't go to the workshop. Educate yourself, don't educate yourself. Read books, don't read books."

She said, "You owe it to your victims to do the best you can with the life you have left."

And she closed the cell door.

It took me a few days to come to terms with what she'd said. Then I thought, I've got to do the best I can, I've got to live. Having been sentenced to life, I'm going to try to live. I continued on.

Belonging

Being good at English – prison's such a small world, everybody knows everybody's business. I became known as the guy who could write a good letter. And I liked that. At last, I had a place in my community. At last, I had a

role. I belonged somewhere. I had something to offer other people in my circle. I could write a good letter. And I was busy, writing an awful lot of letters. Letters to the probation service, letters to the parole boards, complaints to the governor. I loved doing those. Got a lot of vicarious pleasure from writing complaints to the governor. And I had a role. I started writing groups, I got involved in prison magazines.

Fourteen years in, I met a yoga teacher. Wow. That was amazing. His name was Andrew James. He came to my little prison in Nottingham, to the prison chapel. I hadn't realised how stressful prison was, until I met Andrew. Because I had a yoga session, it taught me that what the thing was, there is no goal. You just stand in what's called the mountain position, and then you relax. You bend forward. Oh, God, the tension that was on my shoulders, on my back. The relief I felt after that, my goodness. It wasn't just me, there was a group of us in this group. And we started up a yoga class. And that brought some peace into my life. To my cell. So I was the guy that could write a good letter. I was into all this writing stuff. I was surviving on the wings and landings. I was quite a robust character, I had a robust life before prison, so I was a bit of a survivor. I wasn't a goodie goodie, but I wasn't a baddie baddie. I sort of walked that middle line. And I found a way to live in there.

If you're reading this on the outside, you can watch the full talk online. Search "PrisonPhoenixTrust" on YouTube to find our channel.

"The only way to gain power in a world that is moving too fast is to learn how to slow down. And the only way to spread one's influence wide is to go deep. The world we want for ourselves and our children will not emerge from electronic speed but rather from a spiritual stillness that takes root in our souls. Then, and only then, will we create a world that reflects the heart instead of shattering it."

Marianne Williamson, spiritual teacher, author and lecturer





Falling Snow

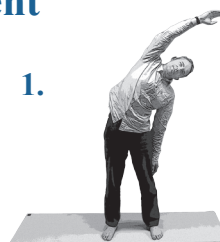


By Brent



This sequence is about turning and returning: the turning of the seasons and the returning to your breath, just as the snow returns to earth in winter. As you move through the poses, try returning your attention back to your breathing - can you do it throughout the whole sequence?

1.



flow slowly between these 10 times

2.



flow slowly between these 10 times



4.



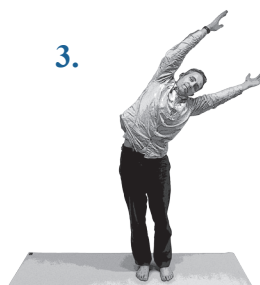
hold for 10 slow breaths

5.



take three big sighs

3.



flow slowly between these 6 times

6.



hold for 10 breaths

7.



hold for 10 breaths

8.



Lie like this, hands resting on your belly and elbows on the floor. Count your breaths from one to ten, then start again. Do this ten times. If your attention wanders, gently return it to the breath.

Lao Tzu said, 'The snow goose does not have to bathe to make itself white. Neither do you need to do anything but be yourself.' During whatever festive holidays you celebrate - Ashura, Christmas, Hannukah, Lohri, Yule, Bodhi Day, or Vasant Panchami - may the snow goose's wisdom be with you. Happy Holidays!

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

