



Newsletter, Autumn 2018

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Who doesn't know the feeling, "This shouldn't be happening to me?" Who hasn't ever wished to be in a completely different situation than the one they find themselves in? To be whisked into an alternative life? To be away from difficult issues and trying people? Almost all of us can relate to people like the writer on page 2, who says he didn't have prison as part of his retirement plan.

Life has a way of taking its own course, despite our plans and hopes. Maybe it changes when we want it to stay the way it is. We can't really force it to go how we want it to go. Or maybe we can for a while, but the negative effects of all that forcing soon becomes apparent. And then we realise that we're fighting it.

I'm in awe of the many people in prison who tell us of how they've stopped fighting pointless battles with themselves and manage to find some stability and even happiness. Or like Antonio in the Prison Phoenix Trust book *Peace Inside*, who was, with no warning, kept in prison longer than expected due to a bureaucratic mistake. He was able to turn what could have been a poisonous experience into a gift, letting go of thoughts of resentment and focussing instead on his inner sense of well-being. This was thanks to the meditation practice he'd developed during his sentence. He wrote while still imprisoned, "Through a mindful approach to uncertainty and hardship I am now freer and stronger than ever."

Deeply impressive too are people who work under intense pressure in prisons, and who still find opportunities to do their work well, even as things don't go to plan. One yoga teacher told me recently of going to teach a new class in the prison where she works. When no students turned up because the necessary groundwork hadn't been done by the prison, this was naturally

disappointing for her. She'd been working for three years to start this class, and it wasn't supposed to happen this way! It was also frustrating for the staff member assigned to oversee the session. But the teacher's grounding and resilience helped her experience the situation not as a brick wall, but an opportunity: she offered

20 minutes of yoga postures and breathing exercises to the staff member. The staff member, like Antonio, appreciated connecting to a part of herself that was deeper than her frustrated, overworked self. (And this class has since begun, successfully.)



The yoga class at HMP Guys Marsh, which has run since 2014

A Fairer Society



There are also people who take their experience of yoga and meditation into their work of creating a fairer society. For example, Positive Prison? Positive Futures (PP?PF) is a peer-led Scottish charity which understands the incredible difficulties that former prisoners have as they seek reintegration. Having served

their sentences, people can find themselves discriminated against and locked out of society in various ways. Using innovative and inspiring means, PP?PF are supporting the integration of former prisoners. The founder, Pete White, said the organisation wouldn't have come about if he hadn't been introduced to yoga and meditation when he was serving his sentence at HMP Edinburgh.

Whatever the particular circumstances of your life right now, know that we are with you, and happy to share these time-tested practices of meditation and yoga with you. They may just help you hear opportunity when it knocks...



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



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.



"When a great moment knocks at the door of your life, it is often no louder than the beating of your heart, and it is very easy to miss."

~ Boris Pasternak, novelist 1890 - 1960

From
HMP Stafford

Your letter and
book *Peace Inside*
arrived today.

This prison has a high average age of 55. The oldest is 105 years old. I started in cell yoga inspired by another of your books and the CD, but the prison also started a course in the gym that runs intermittently. I have been lucky enough to stay on it for a few months now. I am now better equipped to do it in my cell. I hope to move to the single cell enhanced wing soon which will make it easier to do when I want.

I was shocked and seriously depressed on coming to prison and it took twelve months before I got help from mental health. I read about mindfulness as a means to combat depression and I combined yoga and meditation as a way of helping me overcome depression and cope with prison. It was not what I had planned for retirement!

For this reason I started to write about self help for anxiety and depression in the prison newsletter. There have been many studies and reports on mental health in prisons but incidence of anxiety and depression ranges from 50% to 90% of prisoners.



From
HMP Glenochil

In general my anxiety
levels are nothing to
what they once were.

Now I feel that when the time comes to say things in front of others that I may be ashamed of, I will have no problem doing that. With all I have learned these past years my mind feels stable in dealing with what I will have to.

Life in prison is a conundrum at times. I may be in prison but I don't feel like a prisoner for the most part. It's all about how you wish to see your life. I like to ask myself a wee question some days: "How could my life be any better at this time?" It's always the same answer: "It could not be any better at this time." That is a very liberating experience. Filling your life with stuff and things to fill the void is only a temporary solution to a void that we have driven into our own hearts with the belief that the grass is always greener, only to get there and find more grass. I'm happy to tell you that I have learned this lesson, though I still fall into the trap from time to time. The only difference is now I don't get caught.



I was writing in my journal today that almost every day I'm blessed with some form of kindness. I feel very blessed to be part of the beauty of humanity. In truth, do I really have anything to complain about? Sometimes I don't only think of myself in prison but think of all the people around the world who live in prison too. I'm actually part of a great assembly of potential goodness, greatness, and most of all true love. I believe that people in prison who have been there for a long time know what love truly means.

From
HMP Forest Bank

I've had *Freeing the Spirit* and the CD in the past, but they have been helping me a lot more this time. I really took my time in reading it and found something I missed last time. I do all the yoga. The Sun Salutation wakes the whole body up and I've been doing it every morning and feeling the benefits. The meditation in there is top and helping me a lot, and the poem about how you breathe cheers me up. I've put down for yoga classes in here and hopefully I'll start it this week.



From
HMP Channings Wood



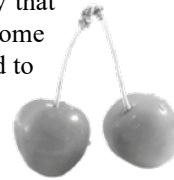
Prison can be challenging. As the new Prisons Minister Rory Stewart said, anyone who thinks UK prisons are holiday camps has stayed

in some very strange holiday camps! Amongst many other facets of prison life, you are constantly walking a fine line between making it clear (to other prisoners) that you are quite prepared to stick up for yourself at all times, but at the same time, doing it in a way which doesn't then make you a target for those who want to insert themselves as the top of the food chain on the wing. Often it comes down to just the right amount of eye contact, but not too much.

Despite the challenges and the seemingly unending ways in which prisoners, screws, prison policy and ad-hoc rule changes all add up to constantly contributing to an oppressive regime and climate, it is possible to maintain a mostly positive outlook and approach to daily life.

For me, mindfulness and meditation have had a big impact. During the 16 months I was out on bail waiting to be sentenced (I pleaded guilty) I was put on a Cognitive Behaviour Therapy course by

Prisoners'



the NHS - something they do automatically now if someone

has more than three or more episodes of depression. The most useful part of that course was my introduction to mindfulness. I was interested enough to investigate it further and discovered that it originated in Buddhism. After coming into prison and being transferred from Winchester to Channings Wood, I joined the excellent Buddhism group here and registered officially as a Secular Buddhist.

Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*) goes much further than the modern take on mindfulness (which still has many benefits) and I found that true *sati* was very applicable to many of the issues that I had developed mentally over the last 40+ years.

As a result, it is a very different person who will be leaving prison shortly compared to where I was spiritually and mentally at the time of my arrest just over two years ago. I have regained the connection with my young, peaceful, happy self. I now try to help others begin their own journey, whether by example or by answering questions such as, "How can you smile so much in here?"

From
HMP Ranby

Dear Wyon,

Thank you for your encouraging letter. Don't get me wrong: this is an emotional roller coaster of an experience, but isn't life in general? There's an Oscar Wilde quote I like, something along the lines of, "One of the many lessons prison teaches us is, what is, is. And what will be, will be." That sums things up and is something which meditation and mindfulness definitely help me to accept. My emotions vacillate continuously, but my core remains stable. Whist I am moving forward in some way, I don't always have to feel on top of things. A single day can bring feelings of certainty, confusion, happiness, heart break, frustration, clarity, hopelessness, energy, fatigue and a myriad of other guests which I am learning to welcome into Hotel My Brain.

I am no longer banged up 22 hours a day, and am studying at the business academy and doing the fitness instructor course.

Dear friend,

So glad to hear that you are no



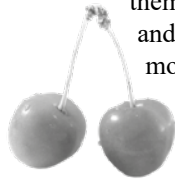
Letters

longer being kept in your cell so much.

When you disclosed that it has been a roller coaster with downs as well as ups, I felt relief. Not because of your suffering - I want you to be happy - but because of the reassurance that you have progressed to this level of honesty with yourself. Otherwise I might have worried that your 'progress' might be vulnerable if any denied, less-conscious or less easy aspects of yourself ever came to light.

I hope when you do become aware of difficult feelings you can hold them in your awareness in a gentle, affectionately curious and kindly way, rather than judging them. (Judging them can also fuel a tendency to deny.)

Admitting our difficult feelings - including our pride, egotism, righteousness, ill will, hatred, competitiveness, and so on, brings



them out into the light of consciousness and thereby, I believe, makes them more amenable to a gradual, patient compassionate calming over time. What we admit and see becomes open to influence.

But there's another really important reason why I think it can be helpful: it helps us to empathise. If someone else expresses a feeling that we are denying in ourselves - then the chances are we will block it in some way. This can be done in a myriad of subtle ways, such as tiny body signals, or changes of subject or emphasis - but the end result will be that they don't feel heard or understood. If we cannot admit and be with our own difficult feelings then it will be hard for us to be with the difficult feelings of others.

To put it another way: to the extent we can admit our own difficulties to ourselves - for instance difficulties with grief, powerlessness, heartbreak, despair, self-hatred and so on - we can also then be there for others who may be feeling similar feelings.



From
HMP Wandsworth

Your regular letters and materials have encouraged me to face another day with positive thinking because sometimes I feel terrified at the thought of my mind. Every minute, I feel so much worry about my family. It's just really hard being away from the people I love and who love me.

It's true that doing meditation will help me stop worrying. Working gradually, I'll get there. As human beings we like everything to work our own way. We don't like patience. The mind is the trouble. Our thoughts certainly affect our attitudes and moods. When a person is full of wrong thoughts, he is miserable, and when someone is miserable, he usually ends up making others miserable also.

Check out the yoga and meditation column each month in Inside Time.

Meditation Corner

A Meditation Education

The other week I was at HMYOI Rochester attending a well-being day. As I stood near a display stand about our work in the sports hall, lots of men came along and asked me what meditation and yoga was all about. One person thought they might need some kind of qualification to learn meditation, and asked if you had to study it at university. What a good question! I told him no and tried to explain why, but really the reason can be best understood when you just practise meditation yourself.

Try to find somewhere to sit where you can be comfortably upright and unobtrusive. You can do this on a busy wing, but try not to draw attention to yourself. Just sit normally with both feet flat on the floor, a straight back and your ears in line with the shoulders. Lift the chest and you should find this is the perfect posture. Now be perfectly still and start to focus on the breath. Notice how the inhalation effortlessly leads into the exhalation. The out-breath is often a little longer than the in-breath, but don't try to force this; just let the breathing happen silently through the nose. Gradually feel the body and mind start to relax.



By Jason

You may become aware of noises on the wing or from a neighbouring cell. Or perhaps there is something playing on your mind that you wish to resolve and sort out. Notice when this happens. Then return to focussing on the out-breath.

If you're like me, you might keep falling into the trap of believing you need to sort out things by thinking about them. There's no question that analysing and thinking about problems is useful. But that is not what we're doing in this practice. During meditation, everything is left as it is without trying to resolve anything - rather like picking up a puzzle book, looking at the crosswords, and just deciding to put it back on the shelf again. This can be hard: the mind is designed to think, and likes nothing more than dwelling on a problem that it wants to solve. Again this is useful - and essential in everyday life - but for now this is different: meditation is all about letting go of this process and allowing the mind to settle.

Meditation has no need for any exams or qualifications. It is probably the least

scholarly activity you will find! There are even stories of some old masters burning all their books. (You don't need to go that far: learning and education are so important!) But, meditation is like getting a degree in that it requires focus and plenty of patience. With meditation people often find their problems have lessened - effortlessly and unobtrusively. Just practise for fifteen minutes each day, and after some weeks you may find this happening for you.



Follow Your Nose



By Victoria



Our Spring newsletter showed Alternate Nostril Breathing as a way of calming the body and focussing the mind. If you found that helpful you may like this practice in which you hold the breath.

Holding your breath for short periods of time will help to calm the mind and improve your lung capacity and diaphragmatic control. If you've tried any other breathing techniques you may have noticed there's more than just a physical effect. Mentally and emotionally, you feel different too - a sense of calmness and clarity.

To Prepare

Before you start the exercise blow your nose and sit in a position that you can stay in comfortably for five minutes. Use a chair, or the edge of your bed with your feet flat on the floor. If sitting crossed legged use your pillow doubled up as a cushion underneath your bottom. Sit up straight with head and neck in line, but be relaxed.

Use the thumb and ring finger of your right hand to switch the breathing from left to right side. Fold your index and middle finger into the palm of your hand, and use the pad of your thumb to press gently into the right side of the nose and your ring finger to press gently into the left side. If it feels uncomfortable to bend the first two fingers down, rest them on the space between your eyebrows.



Alternate Nostril Breathing

- To begin, sigh three times: breathe in through the nose, then gently sigh out through the mouth, making a HAAA sound.
- Breathe IN through the LEFT nostril, breathe OUT through the RIGHT nostril. Breathe IN through the RIGHT nostril and OUT through the LEFT. This completes ONE round. Repeat two more times.
- As you do this, you may like to count the in and out breath, using an equal count for both parts of the breath. Start by counting to four as you breathe in each time, and counting to four each time you breathe out.

If you're new to this exercise stick with this method for a week or so before trying the next stage of holding your breath. Don't rush: practise three sets of three rounds every day for a week.

Holding Your Breath

- Press your right nostril closed with your thumb. Breathe in gently and steadily through the left side for a count of four.
- Press the left side of the nose closed and hold the breath for a count of two.
- Release and breathe out through the right side, slowly and evenly for

a count of four.

- Now breathe in through the right nostril for a count of four, gently close the right nostril and hold the breath for a count of two.
- Open the left nostril and breathe out through the left side for a count of four. This completes one round.
- Do four more rounds, then sit and breathe normally for about a minute. Notice how you feel. If you feel calm and relaxed try two more sets of five rounds with a rest in between.

Technique

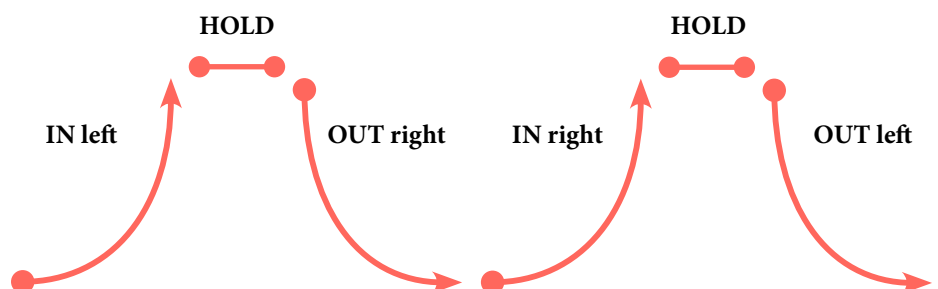
Aim for a soft and steady flow of breath which feels relaxed, not strained.

Don't outstay your welcome by holding the breath for longer than feels comfortable. You should have a reserve of air left in your lungs. If you need to draw in lots of air quickly or you're releasing the out breath like a dam bursting, it's a sign that you're doing too much too quickly. Step back a stage and keep it comfy and controlled.

Progression

With regular practice over a number of weeks you can gradually increase the time you hold the breath by one until all stages are equal and comfortable (e.g. four in, four hold, four out).

If you have high or low blood pressure, a heart condition, are pregnant or have glaucoma, don't hold your breath. Instead, practise the first part only. Be patient. Honour your body. Don't practise breathing or stretching after a heavy meal.



Quaker Connection

By Steve

Steve served an IPP sentence, and is now a member of Quakers in Criminal Justice. As a former listener, he has been invited to speak to local Samaritan branches, and addressed the annual Newbridge conference. He says writing has become an enjoyable therapy.

After my Quaker Meeting the other day, a gentleman gave me the Prison Phoenix Trust Newsletter. I knew he supported the PPT, as he had suggested our weekly collections be for its benefit for a time. I had heard of the PPT when I was in prison, but sitting still was not generally my forte. I find that surprising in a way, given the peace of mind the hour or so's silence in a Quaker Meeting gives me now, coupled with the fact I was a Listener for three years. Maybe if I am truthful, it's a case of keeping busy, to fend off the shame and guilt of damage inflicted, and the loss of loved ones that plagued my mind.

The PPT newsletter isn't a forum for religious evangelising, and that is not the Quaker way either, but the two do connect I believe. We are all looking for a place of peace, where we can clear our minds of the barbs and torments that tend to afflict an ex-offender.

A Quaker Meeting is held in silence.

This silence is only positively disturbed by testimony or ministry when someone feels the need to speak. I have attended many Meetings in six years, both in and out of prison. Around half the time, whole Meetings have passed without a word uttered. I find them the most helpful ones, assisting me in ridding my mind of the clutter that is so prevalent in a typical ex-offender's week.

I know meditation has drawn people in prison to Buddhism, and I have been on occasion tempted to follow that path. I believe a Quaker Meeting can supply a similar peace of mind, but is often overlooked, with many benefits that may not be apparent at first. The whole Quaker community is about the support of others, and that includes each other, something invaluable to someone like me. Like the Samaritans, they are non-judgemental. All are welcome.

I offer these words, not as any form of persuasion, but simply something to mull



A Quaker Meeting for Worship, London

over. They may enhance what you read within these pages. If it is peace you seek, either away from the constant murmurings of the wings, or away from the clamour and speed of the world outside, you may find it at a Quaker Meeting. There is a reason the correct name for Quakers ends with the word "Friends". Without my Friends, life would be lonely, isolated, and without hope.

Stay focussed, stay positive, stay strong.

"All of us need to find a way into silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the divine and to find the inward source of our strength. Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life."

- from the Quaker booklet, Advices & Queries

Our friend Reg at HMP Grendon has designed this year's Christmas card (144 x 103 mm). The inside is left blank for your own message. You can see it in full 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 Cards

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've asked my prison to send you payment.



Peace in Chaos

From Chino, California



This American prisoner has been writing to the Prison Phoenix Trust for 18 months. He is laying the groundwork for setting up a charity once he's released. This charity would support former prisoners, based on his experience of discovering and learning to manage trauma, through correspondence and transition housing. Below, he reflects on his life since he embraced change and began his recovery.

Part of my morning routine is just sitting and focussing on my breathing. I will also make a cup of coffee, sit on the bed in the dark, say my prayers and then focus on sipping coffee and breathing. Throughout the day when I am waiting for something I find a few minutes here and there to stop and close my eyes and focus on my breathing. Or just taking a break to let my mind and body relax. However unconventional my practice may be, it is woven into my day and helps me remain grounded in neutralness. After a lifetime of being consumed by addiction and resentments, my current state is incomparably better.

The move to my most recent prison was good in some ways and bad in others. I just focus on the positive aspects so as not to dwell on the negative ones.

The book and newsletter and your letters help me stop and realign my perspective from the virulent chaos and pain in the world around me and to focus on the peacefulness in the moment by letting go of my ego, plus not engaging other people's egos. The one thing that took the most root in me from the book is that the breath is the source of all power. I have heard it before and believed it intellectually, but now it is the basis of all I do.

What led me back to yoga is that it clearly teaches us to point our finger at ourselves to discover our disharmony as opposed to blaming other people. My focus is on resolution of problems, not dwelling on the injury, mistakes or blame.

At first, accepting complete responsibility for my life - everything that happens to me and everything I do - was totally alien. Removing even the smallest blame forces me to look at my part in everything. Thankfully I have gotten better at it. I have noticed the more I practise this principle the more peace I have. Sure, it sucks when dealing with an issue, but dealing with it starts the healing and heads off the beginnings of resentments. And that leads to the by-product of happiness. Ultimately, every second of every day I choose to be happy or not.

I fight the disenchantment of life. (Why bother trying to change the world when the world violently opposes being changed?) But the other people fighting for change inspire me to keep going. So I take a breather, regroup, and continue on my path toward the mysterious future, in faith that it will be better for me and others than the past. It is a matter of living in the moment, while preparing and hoping for a better life out there.

Grateful every day

Steadily, painfully and surely my training to overcome social conditioning has evolved over time. I have many coping skills to help me deal with the world and its insane denizens of which the foremost is my own lucidity and/or lack thereof. Fifteen years ago I became completely willing to change and since then I have been evolving in my ability to function in a hypocritical, chaotic world. I have learned enough to where I can more often than not enjoy life. Every day I am grateful and celebrate how far I have come in my recovery and learning how to constructively live. Even my worst days now are better than my best days before.

The difference between intellectually understanding and personally experiencing something (like impermanence) always has a disconnect. So yes, it is easier to talk about a concept than realise it deep down into my bones. But most of the time we have to begin with the intellectual to give context to the experience. A big one for me was the concept of having the obsession to drink or to use removed. I intellectually understood the concept. When I experienced it then I felt it deep in my soul because it changed my thinking and perspective in a fundamental way. That is when recovery truly began.

I have outgrown the notion of finding with age and practice the pot of emotional gold at the end of the rainbow. Instead, pain is common, chaos is normal, being lost is being found, things that once mattered no longer do. Yet the few things that still matter are that much more worth fighting for.

Being

*Three poems by Jalāl ad-Dīn
Muhammad Rūmī, 13th century
mystic*

A secret turning in us
makes the universe turn.
Head unaware of feet,
and feet head. Neither cares.
They keep turning.

This moment this loves
comes to rest in me,
many beings in one being.
In one wheat grain a
thousand sheaf stacks.
Inside the needle's eye a
turning night of stars.

Keep walking, though there's
no place to get to.
Don't try to see through the
distances.
That's not for human beings.
Move within,
but don't move the way fear
makes you move.



The Beauty of Meditation

By The Rev'd Peter Dewey



Peter helped to found the PPT, and was a Trustee for most of the last 30 years. He also set up a programme to train interfaith ministers, has been an army chaplain, and most recently, has released a series of videos on the Gospel of St John. To mark his retirement as a Trustee, we asked for his thoughts about imprisonment and meditation. We discovered he had been inside himself...

Travelling in Serbo-Croatia when it was a part of Yugoslavia and ruled by General Tito, I found myself in prison for a short spell. I was put in a cell with four other men.

One was a German tourist who had been in a fight on a river boat. Two groups of football supporters had met and had a fight. He had been arrested as a ring leader but claimed he was really a peace keeper trying to keep the two groups apart. Two of the others were locals, in for traffic offences.

I was accused of trying to take money from a bus station office that was being used by a local woman to count the takings from her nearby café. No one spoke English so I never did discover the time of the next bus! I was pounced upon and beaten by six policemen with rubber batons on an "arrest first, question afterwards" policy. During the arrest one policeman pointed his revolver at me. Fortunately, his commander shouted at him, "No, no!" and I was taken off to prison in Kotor for ten days before the Embassy found me.

The morning work routine consisted of chopping logs for the heating system. Afternoons we washed the floors and passage ways, under strict supervision. A single break of fifteen minutes was permitted. First thing in the morning and last thing at night we could go to the communal wash area for toilet and washing (not always time to do both). The beds had broken springs and mattresses with bugs. Bite marks were visible on our arms and legs each morning.

As a group of strangers put together in a confined space we quickly learnt to work together and support one another. I traded my cigarette ration for food which the others received from relatives. We found an old Halma board (similar to Chinese Chequers) in the room, so I made little Halma men for us to play with by rolling bread in my fingers and letting it go stale and hard.

Prison life was tough, but with previous experience in the National Service training I coped with most things. This was a short



Peter (far right) with trustees and friends

stay but even so it was important for me to keep my mind and body under control and to create a routine. Walking up and down in the prison yard for 20 minutes each day in silence brought a tremendous sense of release. Just being out in nature and sunlight, free from stresses for those few minutes was a life-saving tonic. It was a moment to think of other things and about real life.

Always present

One reason I have stayed involved with the Prison Phoenix Trust is because of its understanding of meditation as something open to people of all religions and spiritualities or none. Its purpose is to help us to be still in body and brain so that we can put away all thoughts of personal and worldly matters and discover an inner stillness that has always been present. With a little persistence and practise, we may come to a deeper level of consciousness and awareness of our self and learn a bit about this self.

It is possible to learn to observe our thoughts and feelings about everything we experience during the day and so become more conscious of what the brain and body are experiencing. We are then no longer just slaves to our feelings which helps us to have more control over

ourselves.

I shall miss being directly involved with the PPT. But I take heart in knowing that the charity's real work is given a fresh breath every time someone in prison begins discovering peace and understanding through silence and stillness.

HMP Erlestoke staff call for more yoga

We have one session of yoga a week. We have been getting big numbers attending. Last week I had to turn lads away (our maximum is 30). These sessions are outside our standard PE programme. This diverse class attracts offenders not normally seen in the gym, including wheelchair users.

I have been in this job for 30 years and never seen a more productive class at relaxing prisoners. We have noticed a dramatic improvement in their attitudes, conduct and behaviour after each session. Because it is assisting with a settled atmosphere and violence reduction, we would like to expand the sessions to twice a week and once a month at weekends.

From David, PE Instructor



Waking Up



By Sally



Maybe you are one of those people who find mornings easy; you wake refreshed and ready for the day. But if you are like me, you may sometimes find it difficult. Emotions, thoughts and memories come crashing in when you wake up. After the quiet and peace of sleep you may feel overwhelmed by powerful feelings that make it hard to get up and get on with your day. It may seem too hard even to do your daily yoga and meditation practice.

If that's the case, you can try these practices. They bring you back to the here and now. Do them in any order you like, as you lie in bed. Choose the ones you like.

1. Becoming present

Lie on your back, with your knees bent if you prefer, and become aware of where your body is in contact with your bed: your heels, calves, backs of your legs, the hands, fingers, arms. Move your attention slowly up your body until you are aware of the back of your head on your pillow. Finally, bring attention to your belly, gently rising and falling with your breath. Don't change your breath at all, just notice it. Repeat as many times as you like.

2. Freeing your joints, stretching your muscles

Bring attention to your feet. Spread out your toes and relax them five times. Then keeping your feet still move your toes forwards and backwards five times. Enjoy getting your joints moving. Next, become aware of your ankles. See them in your mind's eye, and try to keep your legs still as you rotate your ankles, drawing imaginary circles

with your toes. Next, rock your feet from side to side, like windscreen wipers. Keep your heels still on the bed. Enjoy the mobility in your ankles. Now go up your body, moving as many joints as you can: knees, hips, spine, shoulders. There are many ways to move all these joints. Be creative as you spend some time on each one. Now focus on your hands. Move each finger, your thumbs, wrists and elbows. Bring your attention to each of these and stretch and relax them. When you reach your head, notice how heavy it is on your pillow. Finally, become aware of the weight of your body on the bed and the bed supporting you. Bring your attention to your breath. Don't change your breath at all. Just notice its natural rhythm, coming in and going out.

3. Name it to tame it

This exercise helps with powerful emotions. It helps you to feel in control, to accept that emotions

and feelings come and go, like clouds passing across the sky. As you lie in bed ask yourself, "What am I feeling?" Is it sadness, anger, grief? Maybe something else more subtle? Maybe even a 'positive' emotion? Try not to get drawn into why you're feeling as you do, just concentrate on the feeling itself. Where do you feel it? Maybe in your stomach or chest? Somewhere else? Ask yourself what colour it is. Does it have a shape? Explore the emotion but try not to become involved in the thoughts that flow from it. When you have spent a few minutes experiencing it in this way, finish by focussing just on your breathing. After 30 seconds or so, notice how you feel now. Is it the same? Less? Has it changed to something else?

You may have become calmer and more focussed during these practices. Keep that calm focus as you get up and go about your morning business.

Enjoy your day !

"Prayer is the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening."

~ Mahatma Gandhi, civil rights activist (1869 - 1948)

This newsletter goes to prisoners and prison staff, and to many friends who offer us their encouragement. We receive no statutory funding, but rely wholly on individuals, groups, grant making trusts and faith-based communities who understand the value of meditation and yoga, silence and the breath in empowering individuals and society to heal. In this, our 30th year, we're looking for 30 people who'd like to set up a regular donation of £42 each month (or £500 per year), giving us some financial ballast as we head into the next three decades. If you'd like to be one of those 30, please get in touch.

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