

Newsletter, Spring 2020

RESPECT

Making meditation part of your life can be hard. Taking time each day to sit in silence, watching your breath with no particular aim, the mind can seem like a box of frogs. Sticking with it day after day, week after week when it seems to consistently run riot – this is hard!

There's no instant solution to getting your mind to become quieter. For most of us, it's a question of sticking at it with patient determination. It also helps to remember that we don't need to make anything happen while we sit in meditation, that nothing is missing and everything we need is right here. But we have to practise to see that! Support from another person or a group helps, as does having previously tasted the mysterious depth of a quiet mind. And of course the postures of yoga, breathing practices and relaxation can really help you to be at peace as you sit still.

Another crucial factor seems to be self-respect. If you carry yourself through any given day in a way that is worthy of how you want to be, you may find it easier for your mind to quieten when you sit down to meditate. If you have helped other people out, even in small ways; if you've kept your cool as you've gone about your business; and spoken your mind in a way that's been helpful for others and yourself; if you haven't exploited other people or the natural world for your satisfaction or needs; all these things will allow your mind to be less restless. In other words, if you acted in a way that is close to your ideals, then you're not going to feel at odds with life. You can relax knowing that you respect and like how the day has gone: you've done your best.

This respect can lead to happiness. Many spiritual traditions

see happiness as a helpful, even necessary, condition for the mind becoming more focussed. This doesn't mean that you can't meditate unless everything is going your way in life! It means instead that if you are dealing with the challenges that life presents to you in the best ways that you know, then there is

some satisfaction, and self-respect. And that helps a huge amount.

Maybe when you sit down after a challenging day when you feel like you've done your best, even if you feel like you messed up a bit here and there, you can just relax and not be troubled by the self-criticism just for a little while.

Most all of us have some regrets about our past – maybe massive, maybe smaller – and it's easy to feel self-critical, to the point of feeling overwhelmed at times. This is where a little leap of faith is required, and

helped by thinking just about this day and how you've carried yourself. If just for today, you've done your best, that is worth noticing, appreciating and taking into your sitting with you. It doesn't mean that all your struggles with the past will vanish, but the silence that you taste by letting go into the breathing may give you a perspective and a way of relating to old feelings of hurt and regret. There's a time to talk and think about those old feelings of hurt. But meditation is a time to let go of them, as you focus on this breath coming into your lungs, and going out again, trusting that healing often happens when we're not trying to figure it all out.

This is entirely possible. It isn't magic, or rocket science. But self-respect based on how you've carried yourself today helps tremendously. I hope this happens for you.



Preparing for meditation at HMP Lincoln



**Love from Sam - and Lucy, Sally, Jason,
Clive, David, Laura, Victoria & Selina**

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.

**“A flower does not use words
to announce its arrival to the
world; it just blooms.”**

*~ Matshona Dhliwayo,
philosopher and author (b. 1982)*



I have some work to do, as we all do. I'm still learning to walk away when I feel like I'm overwhelmed, a problem I had before which always resolved in me getting in trouble. I'm enjoying finding myself and enjoying the silence.

~ from Pentonville

From
HMP Altcourse

When I first came to prison I was scared, isolated, on my own, out of my comfort zone. But thanks to the Prison Phoenix Trust I now meditate to find peace. It helps me deal with everyday life. I would highly recommend yoga and meditation. I always thought yoga was for weird people, but it's really worth it.

Yoga and meditation now play a huge part in my life. I'm a lot more mellow and chilled now. I even do yoga in my lunch break.

From
HMP La Moye

Thank you for *Peace Inside* and the CD, *Clearing the Head, Relaxing the Body*. The

book is very good because I can relate to the letters. It's good to know that the benefits of yoga and meditation have helped others through hard times. The CD is great with ten minutes of silence on it. I find taking this short amount of time to accept the here and now can bring a calmness and focus which lifts my mind and spirit up with positive energy. Every night I try to wash away any negative thoughts and reboot myself for the next day. The book and CD are both great ways to help with this. The winter newsletter is positive and has excellent yoga advice. Thank you for sending them - sometimes I can feel forgotten about in here to the outside world.

From
HMP Glenochil

I really love what you say about things being out of our hands and all we can do is create things with love and attention. I could not agree more and I intend to keep this in mind when I am writing and playing. In fact I will write it out and put it where I can see it.

I know that it might seem a bit mad to most people but I feel very happy most of the time and the rest of the time I feel content. At first I thought that maybe I had become accustomed to my surroundings. But I realised quite soon that what has taken place through the process of a long meditation practice was I am able to understand at a very deep level that no matter what is going on in your life, you are the one that decides how it's going to affect you. If something *happens to you* then you have a problem. If on the other hand *you experience something* then there is peace, no matter what the experience is. For me this is the greatest mystery of life solved. I have to laugh, but with compassion when in the past I would experience something good I would be very content, but then when something not so good took place it would make me glum. How is that possible? Only with a confused mind. Everything is, and it is neither good nor bad. This is joy of the unbroken!

From
HMP Pentonville

Pease Inside helped me first get into meditation, but I had to hand the book back to someone. I wish I didn't. It helped me so much. When I first came here four months ago, I had no way of coping. I have been diagnosed with emotionally unstable personality disorder and social phobic anxiety disorder. I have been unstable for a long time. When I first came here I couldn't queue up to get food, I never came out and had no coping skills. I'm 29.

I have been doing meditation for three months now. I will do 30 minutes twice



Prisoners'

a day and an hour in the evening. It is helping me so much, but mindfulness is tough for me as my mind has been running wild for so long. I do pranayama as well, which really helps, and tai chi. I have come so far thanks to *Peace Inside*. It's still early days and I'm being gentle with myself but I know that this is life changing.

For the first time in years I can talk in groups and can regulate emotions to a manageable state. I really understand meditation. I feel it's not about trying to change anything – just acceptance. I'm coming off "auto pilot." I was really confused with religion due to past events but now I know what life is about. It's about living in the moment. Being awake in the present.

I'm on remand. I have no date yet but I'm content! I should be out next year but I'm just taking it one breath at a time.

It's so helpful to hear others also struggle on this journey. A lot of us feel alone at times with these types of feelings but we are not and that motivates me. My practice has slowed down a bit as when I started meditating I felt a crick in my neck and I felt like my body wasn't straight so I stopped then anxiety came back. I read in a book that this can be the ego sneaking back so I just accepted my uncomfortability and now that it's gone I'm back on track.

I still get massive waves of anxiety. I'm a cleaner so I'm around lots of people and I go to groups more. I can do meditation, pranayama and yoga and still feel very anxious. It seems like I have to do a lot of these types of exercises to relax but I'm being gentle on myself. I'm doing

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.

"Your journey of life began with your first breath. Since then, the coming and going of this breath has not stopped. It will be with you throughout this life, right until the last moment. Be thankful that you are alive."



~ Prem Rawat, spiritual teacher; b. 1957
a prisoner in HMP Albany sent this quote

Letters



everything right.

I have some work to do, as we all do. I'm still learning to walk away when I feel like I'm overwhelmed, a problem I had before which always resolved in me getting in trouble. I'm enjoying finding myself and enjoying the silence.

gives me the space and the silence I need for meditation and prayer.

The transition from prison has been more traumatic than I expected. The world is so fast and I am struggling to catch up. Everybody's attached to smartphones. It's like some kind of universal ailment. No doubt I will be joining them in the future, but I will also treasure other forms of communication like the letter and the real face to face conversation.

Bury is a lovely town and the people no-nonsense but kind. It has the most beautiful parish church which has proved something of a sanctuary in more ways than one.

I've been shopping in the sales today, and picked up a great bargain in Debenhams. I know we are not supposed to be worried about "stuff" but I have to invest in a new wardrobe. I can still be frugal; Bury is blessed with a plethora of great charity shops. There is also a wonderful fish and chip restaurant, with great food and efficient and friendly staff. The old me would have baulked at paying the princely sum of £9 for a meal, while frittering away small fortunes on alcohol and other substances. The new me is

thoroughly enjoying what the legitimate sober world has to offer. All things in moderation to be enjoyed!

It would be wrong to say that everything is perfect. Interacting with agencies such as police, probation and universal credit is a bind, but it comes with the territory and I have to remember where I was just two weeks ago.

I have been attending regular AA meetings. I have found this a great way to get to know positive people and to remind myself of where I come from and what needs to come first.

I have signed up for universal credit and have a meeting with my work coach this afternoon. She is very understanding and I get the feeling they won't be too pushy about work given my current circumstances. Rest assured that I certainly do NOT wish to go back to my previous life and behaviour and will be exploring all avenues regarding work, self-employment and writing. I am continuing to meditate mornings and evenings. As they say in the fellowship, "Easy does it".



From a friend outside

There was a delay in my release so I've only been out two weeks. It might have been something of a blessing in disguise spending Christmas in HMP Hull and starting a new year and a new life once the festivities had ceased.

I am now settled in the hostel, which is pretty homely (it's a bit like a budget B&B). The food is great – I just finished eating a piece of tarte-tatin with Icelandic yoghurt and honey. The staff are good and most of the residents are friendly. I have the unexpected blessing of a room to myself (though this could change) which



Meditation Corner

Who Is Thinking?



By Jason

"99% of the things you do, think, and feel are about yourself. And there isn't one!"

We have been looking through the library in our office this week. One page from a book on meditation burst out with the words 'Why are you unhappy? Because 99% of the things you do, think, and feel are about yourself. And there isn't one!' I don't know how you feel about this, but when I first read this many years ago, I felt a little annoyed: What? No self? Who else is sitting here reading this?!

Also how much easier it is to blame someone else for my unhappiness! In prison there are just so many opportunities to point the finger of blame: perhaps your cell-mate is driving you potty; you're sick of the officer slamming your door each night; that music from the next cell along is driving you mad; the food is not up to much; and is it really your fault that you are here in the first place?

If you can find space in between your feelings, you may notice that this list of

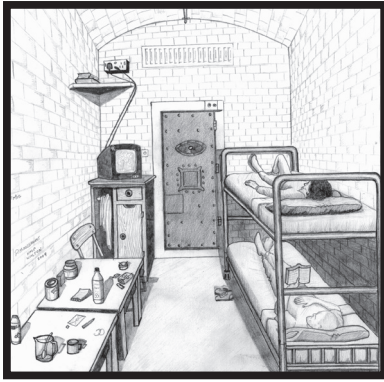
complaints is actually being created at this very moment.

So what can you do? Try not to follow the stories behind each grievance, but instead just observe how your brain is listing off problems, or wallowing in one juicy problem. Are you trying to convince yourself that it is always down to someone else? If, like me, you find this hard, try to focus on your exhalation as you breathe. Your breath carries on regardless of how you feel. Focussing on the breath is a powerful reminder that the mind is often busy, and its busyness is not always beneficial.

So right now, breathe normally and focus on the out-breath, and try to keep doing this for a few minutes. You may well find that list of problems leaking through again. If this happens don't worry: it's normal! Just return to your breath. This takes a lot of practice but is really worth it.

Gradually you may notice that the mind has less need to blame, and is more alert. You may even observe that your thoughts are just a product of an active mind. This is a good time to truthfully reflect on the problems we create ourselves – and also recognise that much of life is beyond our control. Be kind to yourself with this process. After all, everyone is muddling along with the experience that life has presented to them. With this in mind, you may find it becomes easier to tolerate other people's behaviour – and when we feel less need to blame others, other people get on with us better too.

But perhaps the greatest benefit of letting go into the breath is a growing sense that those puzzling words about there not being a self may actually be true. Just keep letting go of all thoughts and see how you feel. Happy breathing!



Cell Bed Yoga



By Brent

The Prison Phoenix Trust has a new 12-part programme on National Prison Radio! It starts with prisoners and former prisoners in conversation about how the practice is helping them find freedom inside, before a 40-minute yoga and meditation session. Tune in each Friday at 3 pm, or hear it repeated on Sunday at 8 am and again at 5 pm. Here, we feature one sequence from the programme, designed by Brent, who teaches at Pentonville. If you can get a friend to read out the breathing and sitting instructions for you, that's a great help!

Yoga can be practised by people of all ages and body types. It can be done standing, sitting and lying down. Whatever your body type, energy level or age, yoga is among the best exercises you can do because it is a physical, mental and spiritual exercise!

You may spend a lot of time banded up in your cell on your bed. This routine makes use of the space and time you have.

If you aren't sure what to expect, our aim here is for you to feel more relaxed in your body; for your muscles to soften and loosen; and for your breathing rhythm to become slow and deep. When your body relaxes and your breathing slows, you're likely to feel better, and enjoy a brighter mood.

Doing yoga on your bed is just as transformative as doing yoga on a mat, because you're using the same important tools: the power of your attention and the breath.

For all the hardships of being in prison, yoga can help connect you to the profound beauty of being alive. I hope you get a little flavour of that as you do this routine.

If there are no other instructions written, hold each posture for ten slow, even breaths.

1. Seated Cat

breathe out

x 10

breathe in



2. Happy Baby



3. Bridge



4. Lying Twist

10 breaths on each side.



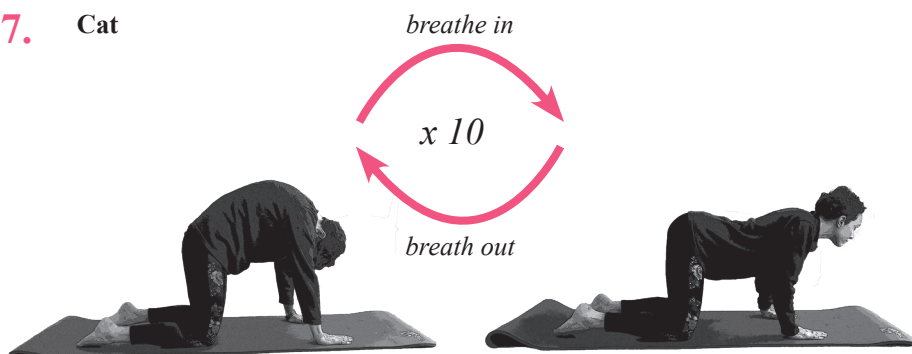
5. Cobbler



6. Neck Stretches

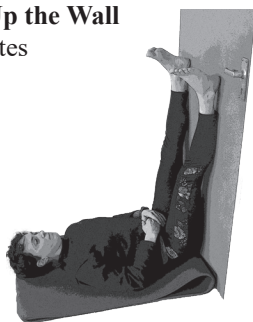


7. Cat



8. Legs Up the Wall

5 minutes



9. Supported Child



10. Rest

This is a chance to rest deeply, while remaining awake and alert. Lie like this, feeling the breath flow in and out of your body. Stay for twenty breaths, or longer if you'd like.



11. Diaphragm Breathing

The diaphragm is a large muscle, like a sheet covering the bottom of your rib cage. When you breathe using the diaphragm you encourage yourself to be calm and quiet. It can help you prepare for sleep, or relaxation and meditation.

For now, lie on your back with your legs flat on the bed or your knees leaning towards each other.

Place your hand on your belly, so you can feel it rising and falling. Continue breathing in and out through the nose. Just breathing as you are is fine. For the next two minutes or so keep your attention on your breathing, and gently breathe lower, into the deepest part of your lungs. As you do this your belly will gently rise on the in-breath, and relax and fall on the out-breath. Keep your attention on your breathing, and gently breathe into the lowest part of your lungs. Again, your belly (and hand) will gently rise on the in-breath, and relax and fall on the out-breath.

Be careful not to push the breath. As much as you can, take out all the effort in your breathing. Let it be as gentle as possible.

You can do this breathing exercise anytime, anywhere, as often as you like.

12. Sitting

Without slumping, see if you can soften, and settle. Allow your face and jaw to be soft. Shoulders, arms and legs are loose. Ideally the back of your neck is long, and your chin is slightly pointing down. Lower your eyes to an area just in front of your knees. Keep your eyes open.

Now bring your attention to your breath and begin counting your exhalations. To start, just feel yourself breathing in normally, and breathe out normally, and silently count, "1." On your next in-breath, feel the breath coming in, and breathing out when you're ready, say "2" silently. Breathing in, feeling the breath. Next out breath, "3." Keep going now, counting your exhalations. Keep going up to 6. When you get to 6, you start again at 1. If you lose count, or if you count past 6, it doesn't matter. Just start again at 1. Counting the breaths is about helping

yourself to stay present to this breath, as it's happening.

If you start thinking about something, or get distracted, that's to be expected and is part of the practice. When you notice you're thinking about something else, gently bring your attention back to your breathing, and refocus on your breathing, counting your out-breaths. If you start thinking about something else again, just begin counting your breaths again. Doing this over and over we learn to focus. Learning how to let go of thoughts and focus is helpful inside prison or out on the road.

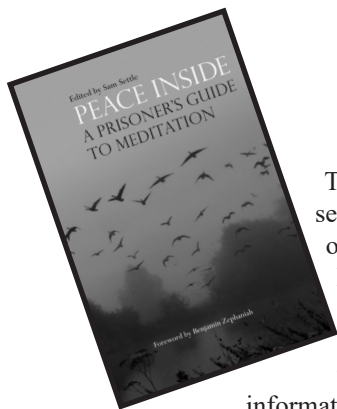
For now though, focus your attention on your breathing... and on counting your exhalations. Allow everything else to be in the background. Keep sitting like this for five minutes.

* * *

Meditation is best done every day. If you want to, start with five minutes and see how you get on. You may find you want to do more. You're more likely to start to notice positive changes by doing it regularly. Practising like this, we become better at focussing and not letting our thoughts push us around so much.

In time yoga and meditation can help us rediscover the essential joy of being alive, wherever we find ourselves.





Peace Inside

From HMP Winchester

Thanks a lot for sending me a copy of *Peace Inside*. I've already read it twice.

It's so full of inspirational information.

How to Meditate

The section on how to meditate is clear and helpful. I liked the part that tells me what to do with my attention and encourages me to accept that my mind will wander, and that's okay! For instance, this morning when I was basking in the comforting peace of the jail at 5 am, I suddenly had a clear vision of a guy who I worked with in the early 80s. I hadn't thought of him since then. It was a magical moment, but I was happy to let go of it as I returned to the breath. Always back to the breath – and back to peace.

Creating a good space

I enjoyed the section on setting up my space, as it resonated with my own need to make my cell clean and orderly. My own "natural" state is to surround myself

with things and clutter, even though that drives me to distraction. Coming back to England to face my charges, I have left my family behind and gave away all my things. Even so, I have accumulated a stack of books, a kettle and tea bags, and clothes and stuff. So making everything clean and tidy before I go to bed makes my pre-dawn meditation even more easy. I can't sit straight on the floor – too creaky and stiff! – but I have bought a prayer mat from canteen, so there is a clean space for me to unroll each morning, before settling down on my pillow on the mat. And there I sit, an oasis of order, and find my breath, and find peace.

I'm lucky to have a co-operative pad mate – he carries on sleeping when I get up. He often says how chilled I am when he wakes, and how tidy our place is. I have yet to persuade him to try meditation himself, but I live in hope!

I have often said that learning occurs in the silences in between words. Maybe peace is found in the spaces between thoughts. Certainly, I don't think meditation is about the exclusion of thoughts, or even controlling thoughts. However, returning to the breath, being

mindful of the actions around breathing and so on is bringing so much peace and comfort as I adapt to jail, on the other side of the world from my family.

Last week I started a new job and was under an awful lot of self-induced (largely) stress. I'm ashamed to admit I had a bit of a meltdown and threw a tantrum on the wing. The only redemption is that I realised I was close to "losing it" completely and I went back behind my door and sat, and tried to calm down and find my breath. It took a little while, but I did calm down eventually. My pad mate and I were even laughing about it an hour later! The power of finding the breath cannot be underestimated – I wish I had known that years ago.

Part Two – Letters

This part of the book was wonderful, astounding, sometimes heart-breaking, and other times I could really relate to the writers. Above all, this section gave me hope that, with patience and perseverance, I will be able to reconcile what is going on in my head with who I am trying to become. It is no exaggeration to say that each deliberate breath is a step closer.

Farewell Brent...

Last November, Brent made his final phone call and returned from his last prison visit as PPT Yoga Coordinator. We enjoyed seven really good years with him. He says he'll miss travelling to run taster workshops for prisoners and staff, and the challenge of helping prisons start new yoga classes. He's still at the Wellbeing Centre at HMP Pentonville one day a week, including offering yoga and massage, and has taken up work as a complementary therapist with a hospice in Hastings. If you ever met or did yoga with Brent, you'll know why we'll miss him.

... and welcome Selina!

In 2013, Selina began offering support to prisoners with their yoga and meditation as a letter-writer with the PPT. She went on to train as a yoga and mindfulness teacher and in addition to her classes to the general public, also teaches at a secure mental health hospital in Oxford and will begin teaching prison staff at HMP Grendon. About her new role as Yoga Coordinator, Selina says, "I greatly value the trust that prison staff, prisoners and teachers place in us, to support them. It's been good to see first hand how prisoners value the books, classes, letters and newsletter on my first prison visits."

Listening In

Prison Phoenix Trust annual event
7.00 pm, 26th May, 2020
Quaker Meeting House, Oxford



Join us if you can on this evening, to hear about our latest radio programme for people in prison. Penny Boreham (radio producer, broadcaster and PPT Trustee) will be in conversation on stage with four former prisoners and one prison yoga teacher who contributed to the latest version of *Freedom Inside*, a 12-part series now playing on National Prison Radio. While the main chunk of each part is a guided yoga and meditation session, the introductions are dialogues between former prisoners and people currently serving time, about how meditation and yoga help them transform hopelessness into hope and gratitude, and find strength and appreciation for everything that life presents. We're delighted that people in prison are able to hear these powerful exchanges, and we want to share some of them with our friends and supporters. On the evening, we'll hear several clips from the programme and the panel will respond with fresh thoughts and insights to them and to audience input. A reception will follow.

*Tickets are £8 and available from -
www.pptradioevent.eventbrite.com*

To request a concession, email laura@theppt.org.uk

Running Free

From Mike

Mike is running the London Marathon on April 26th, and raising money for a charity he really believes in, The Prison Phoenix Trust! Here he talks about his journey through prison and the yoga teacher who got him back to marathon fitness.



I left prison in 2018 after serving a total of three years and four months. When I arrived home, whilst delighted to be out, there were many problems. My mother-in-law had moved in and brought her advanced dementia with her. I returned to a small island community where I was permanently labelled as a criminal. I struggled to find meaningful work, and so undertook all sorts of low paid work. The parole people in Guernsey were unhelpful - their only concern was to restrict my travel and places I could stay. It was a nightmare and I was trapped.

Eight months ago I moved back to the UK, which was a relief. In that time, I completed numerous marine industry courses, rented a house, acquired a car, moved my wife and 12-year-old child over with me and placed my son in a good secondary school.

Having achieved a more settled life, I picked my training up again. Running has always been a large part of my life: I represented Sark in the Island Games several times. Running also got me through prison. I ran every day and we even held our own half marathons (running around a football pitch, over and over again).

Yoga came into my prison life in a big way and it came to be a support for my running. It brought flexibility and general health to my tendons, bones and so on. One day the prison doctor told me I had an arthritic toe. I thought the game was up. But yoga eased the pain and enabled me to train. I went to yoga in Guernsey prison every week and continued to



Mike racing in Sark

practise after I was released.

I always enjoyed and was inspired by other people's personal journeys in the PPT newsletters. Reading them helped me realise I was not alone in my suffering.

These days yoga is an integral part of my continued training and I have adapted my own routine. It strengthens my back and core muscles and stretches and brings flexibility to my body (especially my legs). In the summer I often do yoga before a run in the fresh air.

Unfinished business

I have learnt these days to enjoy my yoga, to find postures I enjoy. These tend to be child-like positions that make me feel good. I have tried to keep the flexibility that I worked so hard to gain. Caroline, who taught me in prison, was and remains a gift to yoga. She was born for it. She has also witnessed a part of my journey that few people would understand – what it is like to be humiliated and made subservient, to be removed from your family and to be labelled as a criminal. I do not complain here by the way – it was my destiny.

The London Marathon and I have unfinished business. I went to see the first ever London Marathon in 1981, on my racing bike aged 13. Around 2000 I ran it and blew up at the 19th mile. I ran it

four years later with my wife, but had to pull out at Tower Bridge with an injury. When the doctor told me in prison that my toe was arthritic I thought I'd never get the chance to run it again. I thought my toe couldn't cope. But I now believe that it can, thanks in part to yoga! I have actually run several half marathons with that same toe. Yoga flexes my feet and the toe bones. This flexing delivers blood and oxygen to the right places. Then there is the psychological effect, with positive manageability replacing negative fear.

The only marathon I did complete was in Paris in about 2002. Unfortunately I ran in someone else's name. I was there to watch and someone pulled out. We decided I should take this person's place and use it as a training run, doing half. In the end I ran it all and had the race of my life at 2:51! But I'd dearly love to get a genuine time, in my own name, in London.

I remember watching the London Marathon while in prison. One of my running friends came in eleventh that year, and I watched him from my cell, feeling so jealous. If you'd told me then that in 2020 I'd be running it, I wouldn't have believed you!

Want to sponsor Mike? Visit his Virgin Money Giving page: www.uk.virginmoneygiving.com/Mike_D



"Yoga flexes my feet and toes..."

Food for the Soul

From HMP Grendon

Another resident introduced me to meditation. I always struggled with anxiety and overthinking so I started mindfulness. It lowered my anxiety and gave me space in the day. I wondered if yoga was something I could add to it. I wanted to find things that helped manage stress.

The Saturday morning class is a nice way of de-stressing after a week of therapy, giving me a weekend. That initial calmness lasts two or three days. I practise outside of that, but being led by a teacher, you can be in the moment more, like in meditation. If you're doing it on your own, you have to think about it a bit more. They have different benefits, I suppose.

I do my own practice in my cell in the evening, when it's quieter. This environment can be stressful, dealing with difficult emotional things through therapy and it's a nice way to wind down and get to sleep. Sometimes I do a really relaxed practice, but sometimes I like to test myself – something more about balancing, or a bit more strenuous.

I used to be quite a structured person and panicked when I didn't have structure.

Yoga's helped me be kinder to myself.

You can do whatever you want to do, go as far as you want to go. If you can't do what you did the week before, then don't worry – it's a practice. It's helped me break away from feeling

this need to meet a certain expectation.

In my early 20s being kind to myself was something I never thought about. I didn't value myself, and it's difficult to have healthy relationships if you don't have a healthy relationship with yourself. I make mistakes, I get things wrong, but I can recognise that and learn from things rather than beat myself up and make things worse.

Breathing space

A lot of the time we're not aware of what's running through our minds and we get trapped. I'd sometimes get to a point where I was feeling really depressed and I wouldn't know why. And it's because I'd be feeding into that negative thought process and not been self-aware and I'd not been able to understand it. Meditation is a tool that's helped me come back to the moment – realise that those are the thoughts that I'm having, and allow them to pass rather than holding onto them.

I used to be obsessed with the gym. A lot of that is about avoiding things, and it can become unhealthy in terms of your relationship with yourself. Yoga and meditation was a kinder way of being with myself. It's not so hyper-masculine, which is what society (and especially prisons) can be. I don't feel any more that I want to be something I'm not. There's this stereotype of what a man should be. I'm so much more comfortable with



myself and can step away from that stuff.

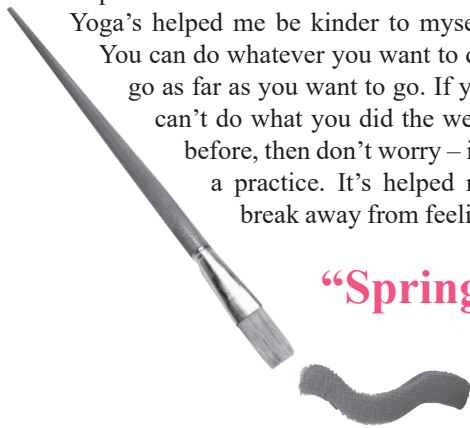
There's this vulnerability in yoga. Sometimes that's a physical vulnerability, like in some of the postures, or emotionally in terms of letting go. Men can struggle to be vulnerable in a healthy way. Yoga has helped me be more open and vulnerable with my family as well.

I was a very shy person growing up. I still am to this day – that's part of my personality. Yoga and meditation have helped give me breathing space. When I get anxious, my mind runs away with me. With my anxiety I'm always pre-empting what's going to happen. Yoga and meditation have slowed me down.

This prison's right out in the country, but I don't notice the birdsong much. Just stopping and listening to that, it puts a smile on my face. It's a small thing, but it takes you out of prison. You could just be out in the countryside. It's food for the soul.

“Spring unlocks the flowers to paint the laughing soil.”

~ The Right Reverend Reginald Heber, bishop and hymn writer, 1783-1826



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