

**Newsletter, Winter 2020**



# ALL SHALL BE WELL

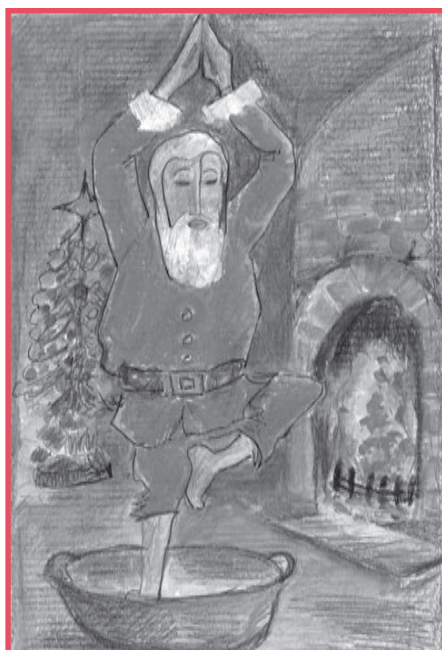
**A**bout 700 years ago, 10 miles from where HMP Bure is now, a woman named Julian locked herself up alone, in a room known as a cell, attached to a Norwich church. Here she devoted herself to a life of prayer and inner silence, never coming out again. She received daily food from outsiders.

Julian was no stranger to hardship. In her lifetime, society was in turmoil: the pandemic known as Black Death was killing a third of Norwich's population. Taxes were high too: the king's court was squeezing the population to make up for massive military overspending in a war with France. And unpaid labour (serfdom) was increasingly unbearable. So ordinary people staged a massive revolt, causing upheaval across the country.

Julian's personal life was no cake walk either. Before her radical self-isolation, she may have lost children to another plague, and when she was 30, she was on her deathbed. But she had a series of visions, made a miraculous recovery, and later wrote about the experiences, living another 43 years.

Such suffering, combined with deep spiritual contemplation in her cell, surely worked to forge her powerful understanding of the essence of what it is to be human.

One important teaching from Julian of Norwich (as she's now known) was her unshakeable sense of being protected, no matter how hard things were, a sense that everything is fundamentally okay, even as things fall apart. She wrote, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." How amazing that she could say that, after everything she'd been through!



**Drawn by a prisoner at  
HMP The Verne**

One of the things I love about the practice that the Prison Phoenix Trust recommends is that it's designed for such rough times. Maybe you're languishing on an IPP. Perhaps you're wrestling with addiction, or unhappy family relationships. Is it possible to find a place of absolute trust inside yourself, even

with such immense challenges? No harm in having a go, right?

If your head's all over the place when you're meditating, you can count ten out-breaths, start over for another ten, and carry on like that. At other times, your mind may just surrender to the fact that you can't understand or rationalise what's happening in your life right now. At those times, you may find yourself sinking right into the breath, no need to count.

When that happens, the reality of your life situation doesn't disappear. All the outside stuff that seems to be making life hard may still be there. And the emotions that accompany what's going on for you may linger too. But there's a sense of repose that can quietly settle in, as you sit tuning in to your breath.

Mystics like Julian from all spiritual traditions, including everyday mystics in Irish and UK prisons, have used - and are using - their cells for their inward journeys.

Delving into silence through meditation, we can transform our pain and the suffering in the world by seeing deeply into our true nature. When we see it as unflawed and beautiful, we too can know in our hearts, "All is well."



**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.*

**"When you stop thinking  
about yourself all the  
time, a certain sense of  
repose overtakes you."**

*~ Leonard Cohen, singer-songwriter,  
1934-2016*



*"I suffer with anxiety and PTSD so finding inner peace is very important. I have made yoga an invaluable part of my life which I will always continue."*

~ HMP Hatfield

#### HMP Swaleside

**I** often work myself up and get angry, bitter and depressed. I have been following the book, *Becoming Free Through Meditation and Yoga*, and CD for six months but have been using it daily since this coronavirus lockdown started. It makes me feel refreshed and eases my mind. I can get so wound up I begin arguing with myself. I pull out the book or put on the CD and my mood becomes more positive. I have become more flexible and can hold each pose for longer.



#### HMP Littlehey

**F**ortunately I no longer need a newsletter because I'm soon to go home. I will maintain my yoga practice in the future with my family.

After nearly four years, have I learnt anything? I met people with whom I would not ordinarily mix. The time spent in quiet and meditation has clarified things that in my normal life would have gone unconsidered.

Have I anything to pass on? Well certainly not the answer to "life, the universe and everything" but perhaps I see more purpose and pattern in life rather than meaningless chaos. And given that life is rather wonderful, even in here, maybe we have certain duties or responsibilities. I even developed a simple creed, for what it's worth, which I wrote out and pinned on the wall of my cell to remind me.

- You have a duty of care for your body, to stay healthy.

*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.*

- You have a responsibility to look after your mind, and to study.
- You have a responsibility to care for your skills, and to practice and learn new ones.
- You have a responsibility to use all three: to help others.



#### HMP Swaleside

**T**hey have loosened the lockdown restrictions in this prison. We can now shower and mop our cells every day. They also extended the duration of exercise from 20 minutes to 30 minutes per day. We still have not had any cases of coronavirus. I truly believe this is because the staff and prisoners have set aside their differences to work together to beat this pandemic. We can only hope that this carries on once we get through these tough times. We must not forget that every time the staff come in they are risking their lives to protect us. I for one am truly grateful for this. I buy the staff a pack of biscuits each week to say a big thank you to them.

Another good thing about this is that self harm and violence rates seem to have come down.

I have also been thankful that the weather has been beautiful. It's as if God has sent this weather so we can stop and take in the wonders of his work.

My friends and I have been doing our yoga and meditation classes outside on the exercise yard. Doing it in the sun adds another dimension to our experience. When we are doing guided meditation you can say things like "feel the sun on your face", "notice the songs of the birds" and "feel the softness of the grass". It truly is great.

#### HMP Onley

**T**he yoga sequences book you sent has really made me more relaxed. I am naturally a relaxed person but I do everything so much better now, mainly my sleeping. It has been great – I'll fall asleep at a certain time and I sleep through the night. My breathing is better, I feel better and I don't eat like I used to, I am eating a lot more veg and drinking herbal teas.

I am still working on the server and yes, you are right, being of help to others always has the potential to uplift the server. I rarely eat the food though – it's plain and doesn't always taste nice – but I



## Prisoners'

get canteen every week so I really am not missing out.

I am now speaking to my girlfriend I was with before I came to prison. She wasn't speaking to me because I re-offended and promised her I never would again because I love her too much to not be with her, but what did I do? I know she likes poetry so I bought a card and took my time with what I was going to write. I told her this will never happen again. I also told her I was doing yoga.



#### HMP Hatfield

**I** began my sentence in March 2016, first in high security at HMP Garth, then through C cat and now in open conditions. All through I have kept up my yoga practice. Without it my time inside would have been very different. It has given me exercise during bang up, stretched aching muscles after heavy gym sessions and calmed me through meditation.

I suffer with anxiety and PTSD so finding inner peace is very important. I have made yoga an invaluable part of my life which I will always continue.

#### HMP Sudbury

**T**hank you for your letter. You touched my heart as nobody had sent me such a nice hand-written letter in my life.

I have been in prison for a long time now. Sudbury is the last part of my journey. I had never heard about the Prison Phoenix Trust until I came here.

I wish I had started yoga and meditation a long time ago. This is really helping me physically and mentally. Now that I have started I will carry on for the rest of my life.

I am currently doing an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening and surprisingly I am able to sleep nicely and all of my anxiety has gone. I can't explain how much this is helping me.



#### HMP Northumberland

**A**s the days and months pass I am finding that yoga and



# Letters

meditation are becoming part of my day to day life.

The CDs are so easy to follow. I have listened to both CDs over and over and I have put my own routine together using them. It's also really helpful that the book has pictures of how to do different movements.

Not seeing my loved ones for so long due to Covid-19 has me so stressed out but doing breathing exercises really helps and takes away bad thoughts. I would love to take 25 minutes at 8:30 am to join in meditation with the PPT but that's when I start work (I'm still working in the tailor's workshop making PPE) so I have been doing 25 minutes at 8:30 pm instead. I'm finding that things that bothered me before don't get to me any more. I seem more relaxed and ready to take on the world.

## Guernsey Prison

**B**ecause of you I've been introduced to yoga and meditation.

I practise an hour four times a week and even yesterday while having a filling done (it was hurting lots!). Meditation and yoga is helping me get through so much, I don't know what I'd do without it and look forward to extending it once I'm out.

Thank you for your letter and the helpful leaflet on joint stretches. I have been doing them before running and ran a 2 second personal best on Friday – in the rain! What an incredible experience running in the rain. It was cold but it felt so good. Being connected like that to the elements makes me feel a small bit of freedom and that's what keeps us going in here.

I understand you keep your eyes open when you meditate. When you first started, did you close your eyes for better concentration? I find at the

moment keeping my eyes open or half open requires thought and concentration from me and takes my mind away from my breath. I will keep trying though – it's probably just going to take a bit of practice.

Thank you for writing. I think it's remarkable what you do and the energy that you put into people the majority of the world don't give a hoot about! Yoga really has been my imaginary friend in here.

### Free Handouts

*Many prison staff have been printing meditation and yoga handouts from our website, to give to prisoners. We added 10 more in September. Ask them to call our office for access.*

## Meditation Corner

# Nothing Stays the Same

**A**s a prisoner, you will definitely be no stranger to the uncertainty of change. Whether it is changing cells, approaching release, moving to a different prison or a myriad of other changes that come your way, it is clear that nothing appears to stay the same. Later in the newsletter you will see there are changes afoot at the PPT. In the office we have been busy making the transition from old staff to new staff as effortless as possible.

This reminds me of decorating a house – all that work and effort so that people just see a pleasant room with all the right colours. I tend to put great emphasis on making change appear effortless, when we all know it can be filled with anxiety and uncertainty. Perhaps this has something to do with an aspiration to move with the times and to adjust perfectly to every situation that is presented to us. This is often greatly emphasised with yoga and meditation. At the moment I have a book called *Effortless Being* close at hand - but actually that title annoys me because life is just hard sometimes.

Perhaps this is a good time to try a little meditation. This will take about ten minutes. Sitting upright, in a chair



By Jason

or on the edge of your bed, adjust your posture so your head and back are relaxed and upright. Your feet should be flat on the floor and your hands resting in your lap. Keep the eyes open, but don't stare. Just let them rest half open. Now turn your attention to your breathing. Breathe through the nose, inhaling and exhaling evenly and calmly. You may like to silently count your out-breaths from one to ten and then return to one again. Keep focussed upon the breath and allow all the background noises and other activity to happen as normal. Don't worry if you start thinking things such as "This is annoying," "Switch that TV off!" or "I'll try this another day." If your mind wanders, return to counting the breath.

Keep doing this until your ten minutes has finished. This is a simple practice but can be deceptively difficult with our busy minds. Be patient with yourself.

Afterwards try to continue focussing on your breath as you go about your normal activities. If it is time for lunch, just eat normally without making a fuss or being overly concerned with the food. Maybe it is time for exercise: just go outside and

walk around the perimeter or whatever you usually do. Accept the weather for whatever it is. It could be time to telephone a friend: just converse with them and make the most of the conversation. You may find that something unexpected happens and the wing is locked down. Just go back to your cell and make the most of being in your own space.

Whilst you are going about these normal, daily activities, there are bigger changes happening all around us. Allow these to take care of themselves and instead focus on what is being presented to us right now. All we can really do is respond to our daily activities, with no fuss or uncertainty. Just respond to each moment and allow the bigger picture to sort itself out – everything falls into place when we totally accept that nothing stays the same.



# Strength in Stillness



By Selina

**W**hen you practise yoga, you start to notice a feeling of strength that doesn't come from pushing or forcing or shouting, but from stillness. Try this practice each day and you'll start to see what that means.

## 1. Mountain



Stand tall with your feet firmly planted on the ground, hip width apart like the base of a mountain. Strong and stable. Inhale, inflating your lungs fully, then exhale all the breath out. Do this five times.

## 2. Rag Doll



Hang down allowing your upper body to relax and respond to gravity, knowing your connection to the earth through your feet and strong legs will keep you from falling. Hold for five long steady breaths, then unroll to stand upright again.

## 3. Hip Circles



Make circles with your hips. Five one way and then five in the other direction. This releases tension in your hips and lower back.

## 4. Eagle Arms



As you stand strong and rooted through your feet, cross your left arm over your right and twist them together like the picture, as best you can. Hold this for five breaths. Notice the deep stretch in your shoulders. Keep breathing in and out as you pay attention to the feeling. Repeat on the other side by crossing your right arm over your left.

## 5. Chair



With strong legs, bend your knees, whilst lifting your chest and arms. Hold still in this pose for five slow steady breaths.

## 6. Warrior 1



Step forward with your right leg, keeping your back left foot at an angle. As you bend your right knee, raise your arms. Hold this strong pose for five breaths. Notice how it's possible to feel strong while motionless. Repeat with your left foot forwards.

## 7. Warrior 2



This time your hips face the side. Bend your front leg, raise your arms one out front and one behind. Gaze at your fingertips. Stay focussed for five long slow breaths. How do these warrior poses make you feel? Repeat on the other side.

## 8. Cobra



Lie on your front, head on the floor. Feel the front of your body supported by the ground. With your hands under your shoulders, lift your chest and look straight ahead. Use your core muscles to help take the strain out of your lower back. Stay for 5 breaths.

## 9. Knees to Chest



Rock from side to side, allowing the ground to massage your back and shoulders, helping to relax you after the strong cobra pose.

## 10. Wind Releasing Pose



Stretch out one leg, and squeeze the other over your chest. Take five slow, deep breaths. Repeat on the other side.

## 11. Rest



Tense and release all the muscles in your body five times, then let go. Let your body and mind relax into stillness, staying grounded in your breath and body and allowing relaxation to become deeper for five minutes or longer.

## 12. Sitting



Sit up for meditation. Start by counting just 10 out-breaths. Over the coming days and weeks you can build this up to 5, 10 or 25 minutes, continuing to count 10 out-breaths and starting again at 1. With practice you will start to experience the wonderful power of stillness.

**“We are not going to change the whole world, but we can change ourselves and feel free as birds.”**

*~ Sri S. Satchidananda, The Yoga Sutras, commentary*

# Can you encourage others to practise meditation and yoga?

*Your requests for books, CDs and newsletters has continued in abundance this year, unaffected by many other changes happening around us. We find it heartening that so many of you are keen to find meaning and peace during this challenging time.*

*We feel privileged opening the post each day and learn how your meditation and yoga practice is helping you to sleep better, feel less anxious and less alone.*

*Please give a copy of our newsletter or just this form to introduce someone new to meditation and yoga. You will read in the letters we publish here, how treasured this can be.*

**“Everyone has a gift for something, even if it is the gift of being a good friend.”**

— Marian Anderson

Authors: Sandy Chubb Sister Elaine MacInnes

**Freeing the Spirit...**



Editor: Susanna Lee Illustrations: Korky Paul

## Freeing the Spirit ... through meditation and yoga

An illustrated guide to daily practice.

For your own copy and a letter from us, return to:

The PPT  
PO Box 328  
Oxford  
OX2 7HF

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Prisoner Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Wing: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to receive  
your newsletter ☐



**By Clive**

**T**wenty years ago I received a call from Sandy Chubb, who was PPT Director, to ask if I would consider the position of accountant for the charity. After some informal conversations, I was asked to take on the role – a leap of faith by Sandy and the Trustees, as I had been out of any formal accountancy work for more than ten years. But, as I have learned over the past two decades, that is how the PPT has met with success in its 32 year history. After carefully assessing any risks, trust your judgment and intuition and give people a chance to achieve their potential. I am so grateful for the chance I was given.

But, after 20 very happy years at the Trust it now feels right to retire and it is probably the right time for the charity to find a younger person to fulfil the finance role. Being well past state retirement age, I will enjoy spending more time with my wife and our family, campaigning on the frontlines of the climate and ecological crises, making music and growing fruit and vegetables on my

allotment.

Of all the remarkable experiences that I have had in the past 20 years, the most extraordinary feature of my life at the PPT has been the people. Colleagues and former colleagues, volunteers, supporters and friends, yoga teachers, Trustees, patrons and consultants are central to the Trust and I will miss you all. In my time I have met in person very few of the many people with whom I feel a special connection. The PPT has a fantastic number of individuals and grant-making trusts who support the work of the Trust by regularly donating money year after year. I sense compassion and selfless generosity emanating from those otherwise dull and anonymous bank statements that

record incoming donations each month.

So, dear friends, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of the PPT. And thank you dear colleagues, for allowing me to indulge my love of freshly made coffee by making the midmorning brew on my days in the office!





**I**n one way, it's hard for me to leave the PPT (Prison Phoenix Trust) after 17 years: it's difficult to imagine any work or organisation that matches my own values so perfectly.

And it works! I know beyond any doubt that these tools for spiritual growth fit perfectly for people with restricted freedoms and liberty. It makes prison easier to bear. It's simple. It's profound. Anybody can do it. And it offers the possibility of seeing your true nature and of living rooted in the sacred, however you understand that.

Many hundreds of people in prison have taught me important lessons about the power of meditation and yoga. If I had to choose one who made the biggest impression, it was the man in Bullingdon, one of twelve taking part in the weekly yoga session on the drug rehab wing. He said at the end of one class, "You know when we were sitting still there at the end, just being with our breath for ten minutes?"



That was the first time in my nine months here that I wasn't in prison. I could hear the birds out the window, and the people shouting in the corridor, but I wasn't in prison. I was free."

Clearly taken by surprise by what had happened, he was showing us the real power of these practices: finding peace in the midst of life's most intense challenges. Not separating from what's going on, but finding something deeper that enables you to respond in a truer, more harmonious way.

There is sharp poignancy and nostalgia when I think about this and the other profound changes that prisoners have shared with us, as a result of their practice. I'll miss being a direct part of that.

But I, like the others looking after the charity, have only ever been a temporary custodian for this amazing project. There is a time and a place for everything under the sun, including a time for parting. There will always be a PPT-shaped room in my heart, so it's good to remember just how competent the staff, Trustees and volunteers are. I hope you'll enjoy getting to know the new Director Selina, as much as we in the office have, and that you have a chance to meet her at some point.

Selina started writing letters to prisoners as a volunteer in 2013. She was so moved by the transformation prisoners wrote about as a result of their practice, that she trained to teach meditation and yoga for the sole purpose of working in prison.

We were delighted to welcome her last January as a Yoga Coordinator, starting and supporting prison yoga classes.

I have great memories of a day spent with her

at a series of yoga workshops at HMP Stanford Hill before lock-down. Her friendliness and openness, as well as her ability to share meditation and yoga in a totally inclusive, affirming way, meant that prisoners felt free to share some of the most important, challenging things that were going on in their lives at that time. And her natural capacity to understand and relate to people meant that we made quick progress with prison staff, as we tried to get more yoga classes established at the prison.

To those I've never met, and to all of you who I've had the pleasure of writing to or of meeting in prison, I wish you well for this one journey we are all on. May you enjoy it and stay always curious about it. May we all keep taking that inward step straight into life, beyond all our ideas about it.



## Christmas Cards



**O**ur Christmas cards come in packs of ten, drawn by our friend at HMP Grendon (144 x 103 mm). The inside is left blank for your own message. You can see the design 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 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.



# A Change of Pace



By Victoria



**W**hen you're feeling drained or tired it's hard to imagine mustering up the energy to rush around or be perky. Likewise, if you're hyped up, agitated and your thoughts are racing, the prospect of feeling calm and relaxed might seem impossible.

These simple exercises can help you switch gears using your own breath. One is active and energising; the other is calming and peaceful. You can practise them regularly for just a few minutes each day or use them when they're helpful.

## **Energising Breath** – Change of Air

This is a great way to warm up if you feel cold. It'll get blood flowing to achy muscles, mobilise stiff joints, and revive flagging energy. Try it first thing in the morning when you get out of bed. Synchronise the movements to your breathing and keep your breath comfortable, steady and measured.

- Check you have space to stretch out your arms to the sides. Stand with your feet hip distance apart, bend your knees slightly, arms relaxed at your sides.
- As you breathe in through the nose, reach out to the sides and raise your

arms overhead. Straighten your legs as you stretch upwards.

- As you lower your arms to your sides, and bend your knees again, release tension by breathing out through the mouth (HAAAAAA).
- Repeat this 6 more times, breathing in through your nose and sighing out through your mouth.
- Pause for a couple of breaths then repeat two more rounds of 7 with a short rest between each cycle.

When you're finished, sit and rest for a few minutes, noticing how you feel.

## **Calming Breath** – Longer Out-Breath

If you're feeling stressed, scattered, or overwhelmed, lengthening the out-breath activates the calming side of your nervous system and eases you out of fight-or-flight mode. Once you're comfortable with the technique you can do it anywhere. But start here by lying down. Try it before you go to sleep or when you want to rest.

- Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat. Tuck your chin slightly towards your chest and rest your hands gently on your belly.
- Close your eyes for a minute, and observe your normal breathing.

Feel where and how your body moves as you breathe in and out.

- Now begin to breathe in for a count of 3 and breathe out for a count of 4. Try this 5 times and rest for a moment. Notice how it feels.
- If it felt rushed, add 1 to each part of the breath count, breathing in for 4 and out for 5. Try again for 5 more breaths.
- If it felt tight or too slow, the count may be too long. Step back 1 and try again for 5 breaths. (Breathe in for 2 and out for 3.)
- Once you've found a comfortable ratio, try 3 sets of 5 breaths with a short pause between each set to check in.

You can extend the out-breath to 2 counts more than the in-breath, if it's comfortable. Don't be tempted to rush this process. The normal range of breathing is 3 – 6 seconds. If you practise regularly, you'll notice that breath count may gradually increase, enabling you to breathe deeper in a relaxed and controlled way. Build up to a 6 second in-breath and 8 second out-breath, as a maximum length.

**“When you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace.”**

~ Author Unknown



*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. Two important ways that friends can help are remembering us in their will and setting up a regular donation. Any support you can offer is greatly appreciated.*

**Prison Phoenix Trust Newsletter**  
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**registered charity no. 1163558**

