



One Breath at a Time

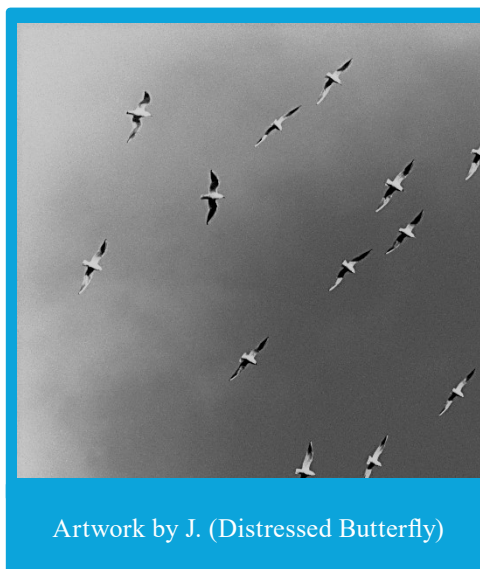
Each day we get to start afresh, with every breath. Not just any old breath that we don't notice. It's when we bring attention to being fully aware of our experience of breathing. That is what meditation and yoga is all about. And it starts with noticing just one breath. When we are fully aware in this way, we start to notice other things too.

A helpful way of approaching this is sometimes called "beginner's mind". We can breathe thousands of times a day without ever noticing one breath. But instead, try paying attention to just one breath as if it was the first time you'd ever noticed it. Try it now. Where in your body do you feel that breath? How does it feel? Then try a few more. Does it get harder to keep paying attention? That is the challenge, but it's worth it. If we can keep our attention focused on each breath, slowly we develop the ability to keep our attention on other things too. On the letters pages, Rob writes about how he's started listening to others more and how that keeps his attention away from himself. We all know how hard it can be to feel like we don't get a break from the tyranny of our own thoughts. Everyone wants to feel more peaceful and they can. It starts with just one breath.

We commit to this breath focus when we are practising meditation. With an attitude of beginner's mind we may start to notice that all that exists is the movement of breath and the focus has shifted away from ourselves. That experience can become very freeing. It takes practice, as many of you already know. Spring can be a good time to create new habits or commitments. Let the fresh air in.

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-focused 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.



Artwork by J. (Distressed Butterfly)

We'd like to offer you a challenge this Spring. Inspired by our trustee Suzy, who is running two marathons - 52 miles - in two days, we invite you to take part in The Prison Phoenix Trust 52 Challenge. Set yourself a goal of practising an activity based on the number 52 - or 5 and 2. For example, sitting in meditation for five minutes, twice a day. Or trying a yoga pose every day for 52 days.

On pages 4-5 is a yoga sequence called a sun salutation. You could do this five times for two days - or two weeks. On page 8 is a relaxation to do with five breaths. Could you do this for two days, or two weeks? Whatever you choose to do, we will be with you in spirit. And whatever you choose to do, see if you can do it with all your attention. Have a break from thinking and worrying and planning, which our minds like doing. Keep on letting go of those things and noticing each breath, like it's the first time. This helps to engage your mind in noticing each moment.

This paying attention to each breath unites us all. We may not be struggling with running a marathon over mountains but we all have to struggle with the difficult terrain of our own minds. This might feel like 'sitting with demons'; as Clive describes on Page 2. As our meditation practice deepens, or we feel challenged, we may all notice something like that. It's where the healing takes place. With regular practice of meditation or yoga, you may notice it becoming a bit clearer how that makes sense, the mind's terrain starts to settle down and may even feel calmer and freer.



Love from Selina – and Chris, Hannah, Mike, Padmakumara, Victoria, and all our letter writers and volunteers

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**“Even the smallest step
is better than no step”**

James Norbury, author.

Letters

From Anon

Well I've started on my yoga journey now and I've got to be honest I had a mixed bag of results when I started! Firstly, I had to "get over myself" and really knuckle down and focus on the task at hand and black out the noise from the wing. As fortune would have it, my pad-mate goes to work an hour before me in the morning so I have that time to focus and clear my mind. My trial has been postponed for a second time after the first one collapsed, very frustrating as I'll now not see an end to this situation until 2023.

I've found clearing my mind and focusing has been very important in "letting go" of that frustration. I try to focus on the things I can impact upon positively. I also sleep better and my bad back I was developing from months of laying down seems to be clearing up a bit too!

The lads on this wing gave me some stick about this yoga stuff - however I've had at least five of them come to my pad on their own and say, "Hey mate, do me a favour. Can I have a look at that book when you're finished with it?!". One lad even said he had friends that did "hot yoga" on the outside and swore by it!! Everyone in prison craves a clear mind and a decent night's sleep, I don't care what they say. If you can achieve that without going to the doctors and being put on tablets for the rest of your life, then you're obviously doing something right. I'll let you know how my journey continues.

From Anon

I've started to meditate a lot over the last few months. It depends on where I am with my mental health but at the moment I'm able to keep my mind on meditating. I'm trying to meditate early evening now and not in the middle of the night because the prison is nice and still at 2am, but I am shattered if I don't go back to sleep after meditating. Sometimes I go back to sleep the minute I stop meditating, then sometimes I lie awake for hours before I go back to sleep.

Sometimes I have stressful dreams and I wake up in a panic, so I meditate to slow my mind down and then my heart slows down as well.

It's amazing. Someone will ask me something and if I don't know the answer when I meditate the answer comes in my head, I will not even be thinking about it, but then it's like a light bulb going on, and the answer is there. It does not always happen but from time to time it does.

It's nice to be in a cell on my own - I've been in a single cell for 10 years now. Life is funny at times. A lot of the time now, I listen more to others. If you don't say a lot folks speak more about themselves and I find that interesting, it takes my mind away from me and that, I feel, is a good thing.

From HMP Ashfield

You've probably seen these photos people take on holiday, holding the sun or Eiffel Tower. And if you've been to a desert, you may have seen how heat haze can make distant things seem bigger than they are, but close-up, we see they are much smaller. So it is when we; 'sit with our demons': they are much smaller than we thought, much less powerful and intimidating. Maybe these demons will even change from being tormentors to companions. Certainly, 'sitting with demons' has changed my perspective. So every day I sit with the whole world: friends, strangers and demons.

From HMP Stafford

Having the determination to take advantage of acquiring growth and positivity makes a large difference to how time goes by, especially in places

like prison. I have realised that I can do good things for the people here. Giving people advice and ideas about how they can make time here positive and worth something.

I have come a long way in the past year. It is because of your guidance and inspiration, and embracing meditation, that has given me the strength to grow resilient and overcome difficulties. I am totally aware that the mistake I made will perhaps never be forgiven or forgotten, but the remorse and guilt I feel will always be the drivers that woke me up to wanting to help people not make the same mistakes I did. I am done with negativity and I am of the belief that no matter how bad things can be, we are all capable of equally good things, even people behind bars. People can change if they consciously decide to do so - anybody can be capable of good deeds.

Acceptance of where we currently have to be, can bring us peace. Performing any action in the state of acceptance means that we can be at peace while we do it. Peace is a subtle energy that flows within all of us and into what we do. On the surface, acceptance looks passive, but in reality it is active and creative because it brings something entirely new into this world. Peace. That subtle energy is consciousness, and one of the ways in which it enters our world is through surrendered action; acceptance.

If we can never enjoy or bring acceptance to what we do, we must stop, otherwise we are not taking responsibility for any of our actions, including our consciousness.

Just a thought, about 'multiple perspectives'.



If we cannot take responsibility for the state of our consciousness, we cannot take responsibility for life and we cannot live in peace.

From Anon

The last 2 years since I came out of jail many things happened. I did my certificate as a yoga teacher, yoga therapist and fitness coach. At the moment I have 5 yoga classes in 5 different cities.

I have also created my own mental coaching retreat with a programme that leads people to the feeling of

awakening. I feel so strange talking about myself and all these things, as we know each other from the time where surviving was the most important.

Now life has been moving very fast but I still love it. The next few years I will keep working hard.

From HMP Holme House

My practice is the best it's ever been. I almost can't believe the thing I've been searching for all my life was right there inside of me all of this time. Inner peace and how to access it through the breath.

Really, it's thanks to the PPT with all your fantastic books, your support and the guided hour on the National Prison Radio that have helped me tremendously. I have deep gratitude for that. I'd go as far to say you guys have played a part in saving my life.

I talked to a mate on the yard yesterday who I hadn't seen for a while and he mentioned he'd had some books sent to him by the PPT. I just said to him "start practising, stick with it - it will be the best decision you've ever made". Good news, I'm no longer in pain - I noticed it diminishing as I did more stretches.

Meditation Corner

What to say?



By Mike

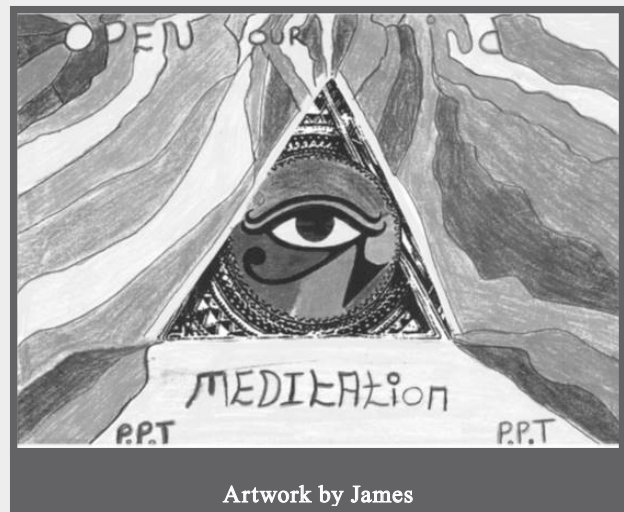
Quite a lot of the time I don't have sufficient words to explain what happens during meditation, and the words I do have don't really do justice to what I feel. The thought of trying to explain all of this to someone else can be daunting. It doesn't really matter what words we use.

I was recently sharing a car journey with a friend, discussing our meditation practice. Both of us were using different words, different analogies to describe our experiences during meditation. What was interesting for me is that we were both trying to fit the other's words into something we could understand. When you said this - did you mean that? This got us nowhere other than confused very quickly. What really helped was the use of metaphor or images; quite quickly we both had our own understanding of the other's experience.

Why don't you try this?

Begin by sitting or lying comfortably and connecting with your body. Feel all the same sensations it has to offer. Then explore the breath, all the sensations of the body breathing. Nothing else to do, nowhere to go.

We then drop in the question. If I could be any kind of water, what kind of water am I right now? (You don't have to do anything else but ask the question, it's like throwing a pebble into a pool. Watching the ripples spread out, you just wait for the image or words to appear). It could be anything from a calm pond to a raging storm, to a fluffy cloud to the frost that appears on car windows. Stay with the image for a while, it may grow or expand. Whatever comes up, comes up. You



Artwork by James

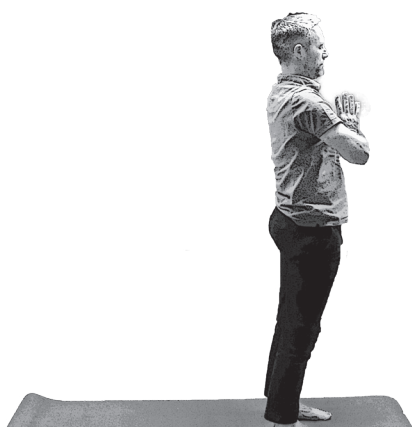
can't get this one wrong! Noting the image, feeling or words that come to mind, recognise how this fits with your current experience. One of the images I have often is of a large square vase. It is in the ocean, the bottom on the sea bed and the top just below the surface. Checking to see if it fits my experience, it did. I felt held and contained. What was useful was realising that there were hidden depths I had yet to explore. Engaging the imagination this way, the whole range of our human and meditation experience can be covered by this simple exercise. The purpose of this is to see what we are working with, going into meditation with our eyes open to our unique working ground. I feel that use of images and metaphor are a universal language that can help us gain a better understanding of what's going on for us. I find it the most useful tool for gaining clarity over what I think and feel.

If you would like to share what comes up, whether in a letter or a picture, please don't hesitate to drop us a line.

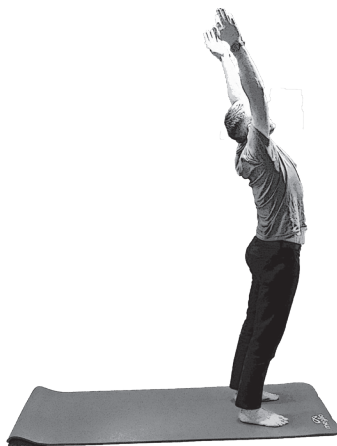
Sun Salutation

 By Chris

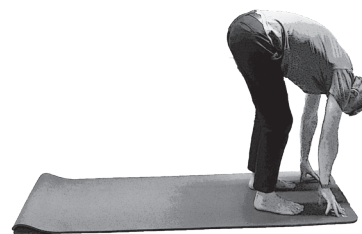
Sun salutations are a great way to start the day - waking up the whole body with a combination of movements that stretch and strengthen the body, and raise the heart rate. It's an energising practice to leave you focused and calm. You can take part in our 52 Challenge along with the prison yoga community with a series of sun salutations. Each sun salute is done once leading with the left foot and then again with the right. The instructions here are for the first half of one round. To complete the round, repeat the sequence through with your right leg stepping back in 4. and forward in 12.



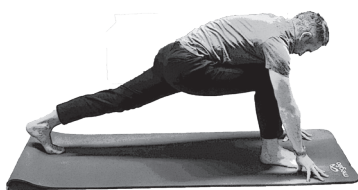
1. Mountain
Breathe out



2. Upward stretch
Breathe in



3. Forward bend
Breathe out



4. Lunge
Breathe in, step left leg back



5. Crescent Moon
Breathe out, drop onto left knee and lift arms up



6. Lunge
Breathe in, bring hands to floor

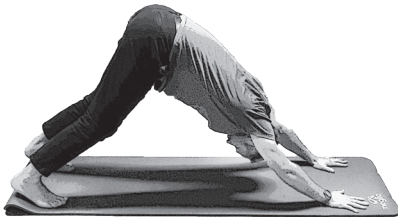
“Man wakes to learn at last,

All life is one.”

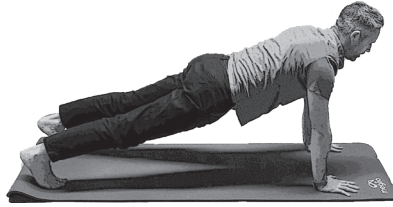
Guru Granth Sahib

Caution: Don't try this if you:

- Have ongoing back pain
- Suffer from eye problems or headaches
- Knees or wrists are painful
- Are pregnant
- Have high blood pressure or heart problems



7. Down dog
Breathe out



8. Plank
Breathe in



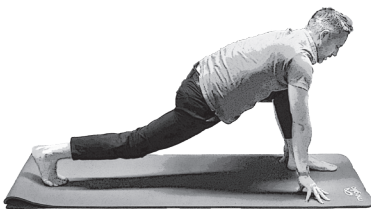
9. Half plank
Breathe out, lower knees, chest,



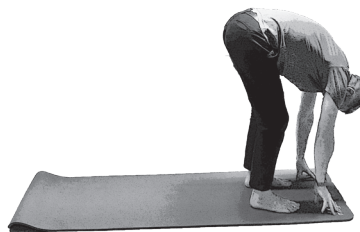
10. Up dog
Breathe in



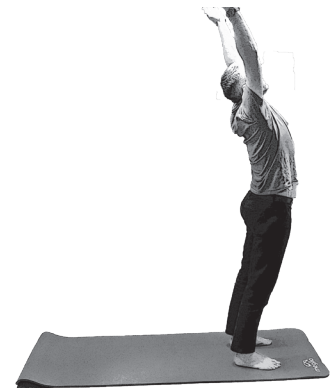
11. Down dog
Breathe out



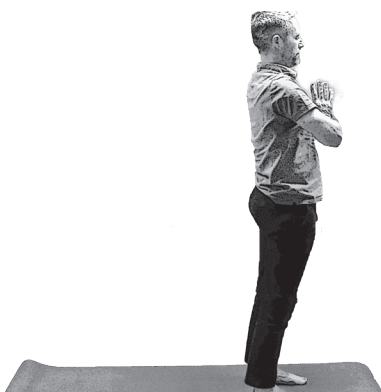
12. Lunge
Breathe in, step left leg forwards



13. Forward bend
Breathe out, step right leg forwards



14. Upward stretch
Breathe in



15. Mountain
Breathe out
Repeat, leading with right leg

TIPS

Don't worry if following the breathing instructions is confusing at first. Just remain aware of your breath and do your best.

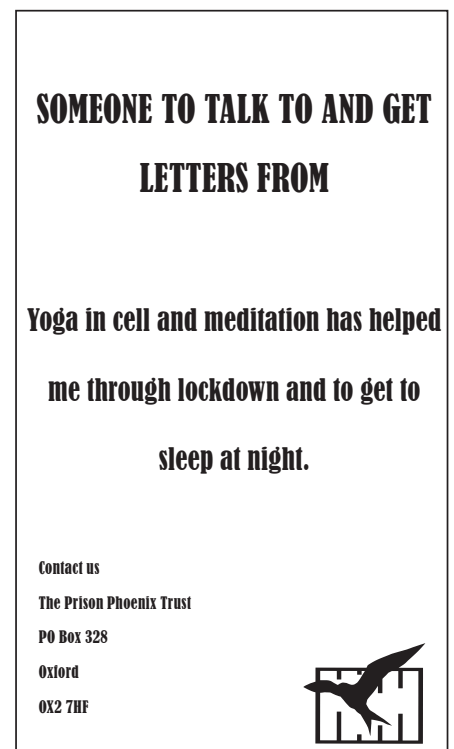
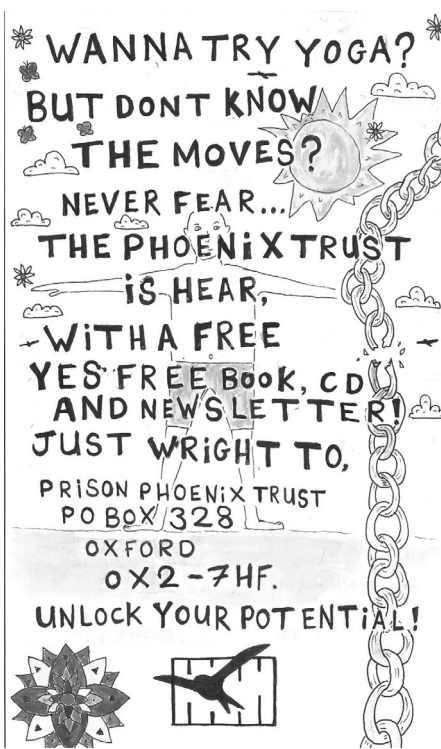
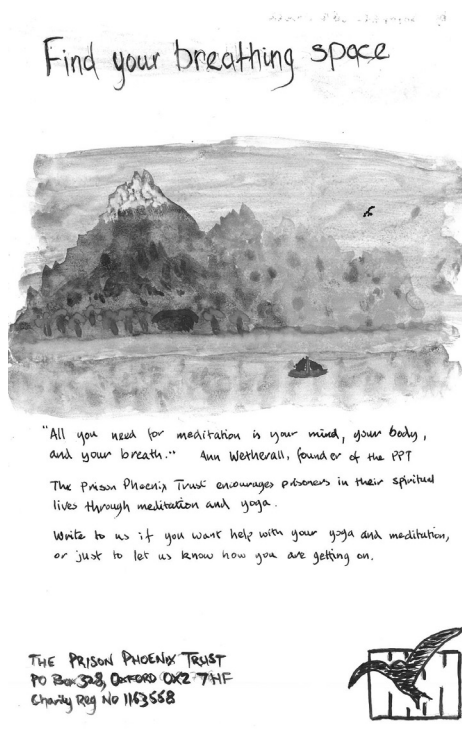
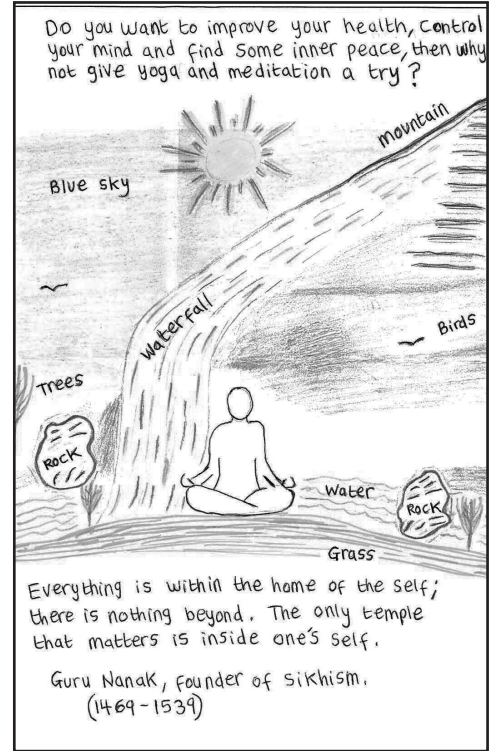
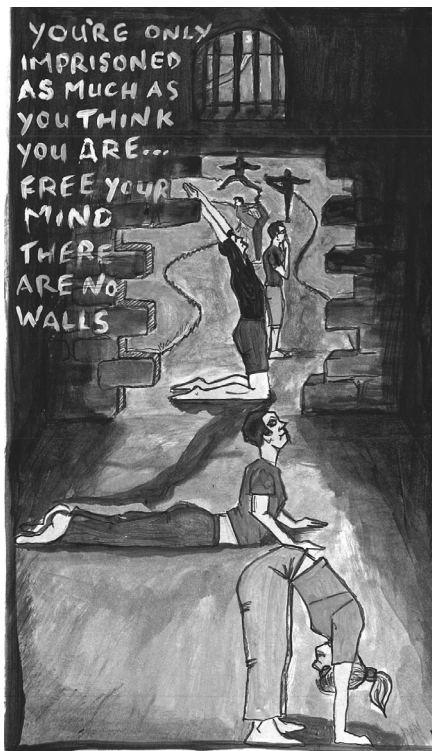
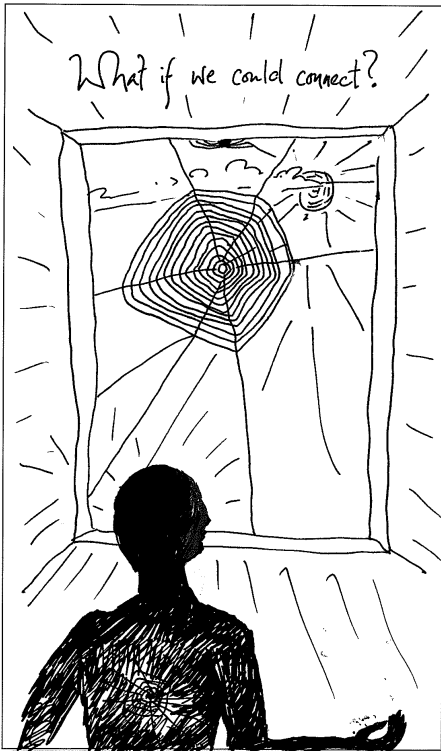
As you get into a flow, see if you can let the breath lead the movement.

Know you are part of a community of people sharing this challenge.

Poster Competition Winners

 By James

I was taken aback by every entry. The creativity, the standard and the trouble taken. It was very difficult to judge but to me there was one clear winner. It has great visual impact, a clear and positive message, and I was particularly impressed by the breaking down walls to freedom. Congratulations Reg! The high standard of entrants is enabling the PPT to create six posters from all the prize winning entries pictured here. They're all excellent. Thank you everyone who took part to inspire others.



Putting One Foot In Front of the Other

 By Suzy

Suzy is a Trustee of The Prison Phoenix Trust and a senior manager in the prison service in the UK. On 14-15 May she is running 52-miles across some difficult terrain to raise awareness and funds for the PPT.

What motivates you to undertake such a difficult challenge?

I have been running marathons and ultra-distances for a few years now. Then the pandemic hit but the fire kept burning inside and I thought it would be a great opportunity to raise awareness and hopefully some funds for the PPT which is a charity that does such wonderful work.

How will you keep going when it gets tough or you feel like giving up?

My regular and life-long yoga practice has given me the ability to focus and stay strong through tough times. Also, in ultra running it's ok to walk! It's a long way and you have all day to do it so no need to punish yourself. If the tracks get steep/slippery/stoney, what is known as 'technical' running, I walk; for the sake of safety and to conserve energy for later in the day. Think hares and tortoises...

What do you do to train - physically and mentally?

I think the answer is regular runs. I don't have any gadgets, I just enjoy the trails and get back when I get back. It's an unusually relaxed approach but works for me. Mentally, I often chunk up the distance into smaller bite sizes - a marathon is just a bit more than 5 x 5 miles which sounds so much easier. I have many favourite yoga poses that I do most days that I am sure help me keep

strong, flexible and balanced. I think yoga and running are perfect partners but then I am such a huge fan of yoga as I think it supports so many other activities and life skills.

What thoughts go through your head as you run?

There's a runner's saying, 'if you ain't solved it after 5 miles there's no solution'; It really is problem solving time when your brain shakes down all the thoughts that are constantly whizzing around and somehow you find answers to knotty problems. I also like to notice the seasons and hear the sounds around me. It is a form of meditation.

What does it mean to you for people throughout the prison community to be joining together supporting you with their own 52 challenges?

This is so exciting! I am looking forward to hearing what people will be doing so I can think of you all while I'm out there. It will be so lovely to think we're all doing our bit collectively. I may be many miles away but my heart will be with you as we take this on together. I don't underestimate the expectation on me though and have moments when I think that putting one foot in front of the other is the easy bit!

Any advice for those struggling with their own challenges?

Stay strong and focussed - yoga will

support you in that. Many things in life will try to de-rail you but if you keep going back to what you believe to be the way forward, that is right for you then you can deflect the negativity. Also, remember that support is out there - sometimes it's hard to swallow your pride and ask for help but generally other people are good, kind and only too willing to help someone else.

It must be quite solitary - what is that like?

I don't see isolation as a negative thing. I use the opportunity for feeling free and having head space. It's very different to road racing. A trail runner never speeds off and leaves someone struggling, it's just too dangerous in what can be remote and hostile terrain. It brings out the best in people.



The Prison Phoenix Trusts 52 Challenge!

The PPT are coming together to join Suzy in her 52 mile marathon challenge. We are doing this by sharing the experience from where we are. By meditating or practising yoga, or something else. In this newsletter you will see different examples of ways you could participate in this challenge, or choose your own challenge.

Please let us know if you take part. We would love 520 people to do our 52 challenge!

Name: _____

Establishment/address: _____

Tell us about your activity: _____



Being Peaceful

A resting pose with breath awareness

 By Victoria

This short breath practice may help rest your body and calm your thoughts when you want a break from noise on the wing, or the whirling thoughts in your mind. Taking small moments to focus on your breath helps you take a step back from being caught up in what's going on, in and around you.

You can also try this at the end of a yoga practice, like the sun salutations on pages 4-5. If you're constantly 'on the go', wired, or struggling with things on your mind, taking time to focus entirely on yourself may feel challenging. Start with just 5 breaths, two days running to begin with a new healthy habit.

To prepare

Get comfortable, resting on your back with your knees bent.

The breath

Take a deep breath in and sigh the breath out. Do this again.

Notice the feeling of what's supporting your body. Whether it's in your bed, the floor, or the ground outside.

Awareness

Starting with your head, see if you can be aware of the feeling of your breathing and body as you move your attention down towards your feet.

The practice

Breath 1: Notice the feeling of the back of your head as you breathe in.

Breath 2: Notice the feeling of your shoulders.

Breath 3: Notice your back and the feeling of your abdomen moving as you breath (like the picture).

Breath 4: Notice your legs.

Breath 5: Notice your feet.

You can do this again, several times if you'd like. It's very helpful if you are feeling agitated.

Caution:

Be careful with this if you have a cold or illness that affects your breathing.

Stop if you feel dizzy or light-headed. When this happens becoming aware of the feeling of the ground can help.

If you'd like to join our 52 challenge, try 2 rounds of 5 breaths. Then let go of the counting but continue to notice your body resting and the motion of your breath.

**“And revive
whatever peace
and love has
died in me”**

Islamic prayer

TIPS

If lying on your back is uncomfortable, try sitting on a chair.

Breathe in and out through your nose, if you can..

Take steady evenly paced breaths.



This newsletter goes to members of the prison community and to our many friends on the outside who continue to offer us their encouragement. The Prison Phoenix Trust is a small charity depending totally on supporters' kindness and financial generosity to continue in our work to help our friends inside. One way you can help is to consider remembering us in your will. Any sum, however small, is much appreciated.

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registered charity no. 1163558

