

Peace from stillness



Welcome

Quiet and stillness can be underrated, until that luxury is taken away. After the noise and busyness of life bursting with energy in the summer months, winter may also remind us of the great value of quiet and a dulling of our senses. This summer it was stifling hot and tempers boiled. People are often surprised how much they value quiet and the power of stopping and 'doing nothing'. This can be a revelation!

In the letters and notes we receive each day, many of you would like help to feel more peaceful and have some tools to feel more positive about onward life. Or to just be able to sleep better. On these pages we have yoga poses to help you wind down and sleep and on the back page how to connect to your breath to ease into feeling calmer and focussed. We can all resist taking time out to just be with ourselves, finding ways to be busy and other things to distract us from uncomfortable thoughts or feelings. *Continued page 4.*

Unnamed, HMP
Maidstone

**"Everyone holds
a key to their
own happiness
somewhere"**

You will read on these pages how some of our readers learnt to value stillness. 'Sit still and turn your mind to the light', from a writer at HMP Haverigg, and how yoga and meditation helps a writer to sleep and another find the key to his happiness. It means a lot to us to be able to share these with you and a free gift you can give to someone who might value it, see page 3.

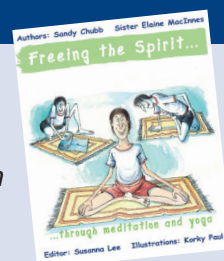
Love from us all

*Selina, Chris, Hannah, Mike, Padmakumara, Victoria
and all our volunteers*

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, DVDs, newsletters, free taster workshops and weekly classes.

See inside:

Give a gift
*Freeing the Spirit
..through meditation
and yoga*
Page 3



Sleep well

Yoga poses to help you sleep
Page 6



Exploring your breath

In 3 parts
Page 8

Letters

Letters are published with permission. Thank you to those kindly sharing their experiences to help others.

From HMP Littlehey

The only time I ever did exercise was whenever I had a fight. But that's now all changed for the better. I no longer wish to live my life the way that I have done for the past few decades. And I have put in the work to change my kind of lifestyle. I have learned to walk away from fights and confrontations, and I am determined to never get into trouble with the police/authorities ever again. *I just want to live my life in peace and quiet* from now onwards.

From HMP Oakwood

I suffer from anxiety attacks and depression and at times find it difficult to focus and function. However, since reading and participating in some of these daily routines I feel myself to be more focused and in a happier place.

Anon

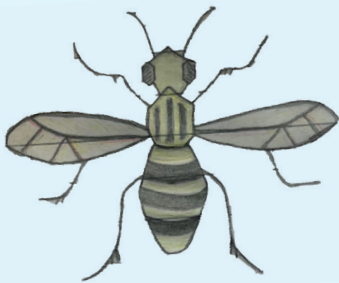
I had a little wobble recently of negative self-image and thought once again the ability to simply accept that to feel that way is OK, but also must not be allowed to fester inside makes all the difference. I was discussing it with another prisoner recently and found myself explaining that it is not pretending that you do not feel bad, or ignoring it even, but about embracing the fact that you can feel it and the existence of the feeling is perfectly allowed which leads to it simply having less power over you. If I have depressed or anxious thoughts, for example, when I'm trying to sleep, I say, "not now thoughts, I cannot do anything now and you are not helpful so while I don't mind you being there I would rather you let me deal with you tomorrow". Then *I allow for them to be flowing during my meditation*, this scheduled 'worry time' makes me not feel as if I'm ignoring my feelings, but also not letting them keep me awake.

Unnamed, HMP

I cannot overstate the joy of movement and spirit that I get when performing yoga sequences, especially the sun salutation in the yard. We have our exercise time first thing and are fortunate to face east to the rising sun. *I feel a real energy with nature* and the natural rhythms when bathed in sunlight, muscles moving my body, stretching to the sky above, rooted to the earth below. My meditation practice continues though I have found it less easy to clear my mind. Breath is key I know, and I have had some success in times of acute stress, waiting for court appearances for example, in finding that peace within the meditation of my over-active mind. I try to do mindfulness in general during moments of panic or distress and using the CD and its exercises have really helped me *find a tranquillity that I never thought possible*.

I am also a keen advocate for yoga and meditation on my wing. People will often come to me to talk though their issues and seek help. Some have managed to allow themselves to engage with yoga, despite the misgivings and fear of its supposed incompatibility with masculinity and strength. It saddens me that this barrier exists for so many in both physical and mental pain, as yoga is the perfect solution for both, especially in combination with talking out our feelings and sharing the load.

The Bee



If you would like help to read the newsletter, ask a member of staff about Shannon Trust.



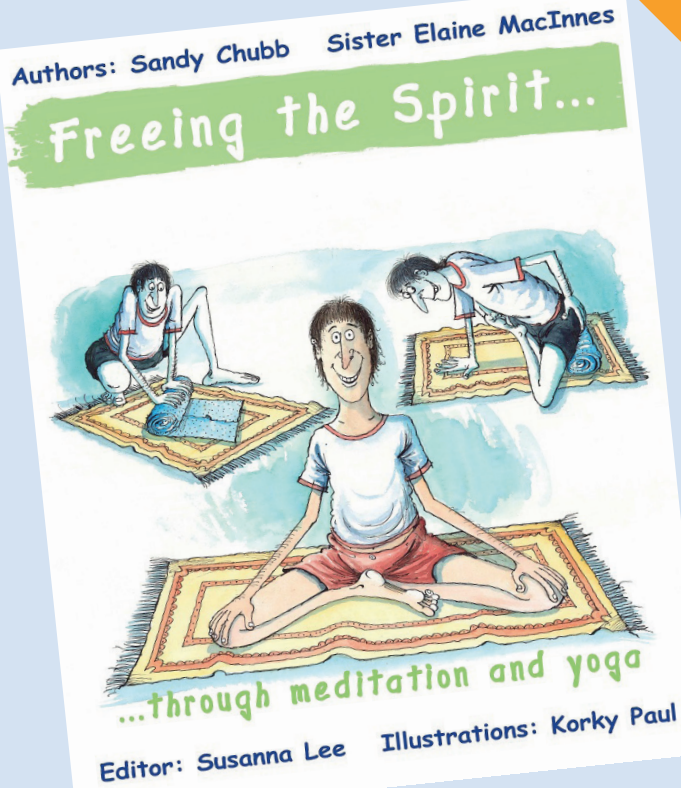
From HMP Maidstone

I am generally doing okay, but I did feel extremely low a few evenings ago. There was not a specific reason, as there often isn't. It just suddenly comes over you (we have this tendency to ask, "what happened" and to try to find a reason, when often there isn't one). *I decided to go with it and just lie on the bed, doing nothing at all*. After a while I got this image in my head of a concrete prison wing and a small colourful flower blossoming and coming through a small crack in the concrete, and how this image could be the front of a book cover, titled: *The Prison Flower – How to Blossom in a Harsh Environment*. This immediately changed my world completely and made me happy.



What this made me realise is that the key to my happiness is creativity. Even just coming up with such a small thing makes me content inside. I do think the main failure in my life is where I didn't manage to satisfy this inner need. I believe that *everyone holds a key to their own happiness somewhere*, they just might not have found it. I'm starting to learn to control my emotions a bit better. The meditation practice definitely plays a role. But the other thing is the realisation - so what? So, what if I feel down and don't feel like doing anything? As soon as you realise that and accept being down and not wanting to do anything, you paradoxically feel better. *Sometimes it is good to just do nothing and feel okay about it*.

You might like to tune into The Prison Phoenix Trust's yoga and meditation programme, Freedom Inside, on National Prison Radio, Every Friday at 3pm Every Sunday at 8am and 5pm



Freeing the Spirit

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Peace from stillness

Continued from page 1. What does it feel like to stop and sit still? Can be hard can't it. Turning off the TV. Finding a way to just be with ourselves and all the turmoil that might go with it. Yoga and meditation give us a framework to actively stop being caught up in all our self-distractions.

When we spend time in stillness, we might learn things about ourselves that surprise us. You will read on page 3 how a writer became aware of the key to his happiness by allowing himself to *"do nothing at all."*

This might be by lying on our beds, like he describes, but this 'doing nothing' is also the jewel of meditation. By sitting in meditation, with a commitment to allowing ourselves time to just be. And to just be with our breath, may be extraordinarily powerful. With a commitment to regular practice, we may find one day we have eased into a place of acceptance. Quietly and softly like falling snow.

From HMP Dartmoor

This week is a little mini retreat as we had quite a bit of lockdown. This morning I did a long yoga session, then meditated for 20 minutes or so and have been quietly reading. Writing this afternoon, more yoga and probably some TV later after supper.

I have been able to pick a few stems of flowers from the gardens. Placed in a plastic bottle they make a nice break and add life to my 'cabin'. They are good to look at in a mindful way. I have also taken care to show gratitude whenever possible. It's amazing how much we have to be grateful for – even in prison – when compared with some of the suffering in the world today. ***Balance is my way forward. Doing good things for myself and others is so beneficial.*** So is smiling and accepting, although the path ahead is uncertain, and with further challenges to come.

A writer found a tranquillity he never thought possible by practising yoga on the yard and a writer from Littlehey can now walk away from fights and confrontations and now has a very different life of peace and quiet on his horizon.

By finding time to just be with ourselves, during yoga or meditation, we are able to access stillness.

This allows our deep inner wisdom to emerge and a connection to a greater energy.

These things are with us all the time, but when we are too busy distracting ourselves, we don't allow the space for this to shine through. A writer at HMP Dartmoor has some ideas of how to do a mini retreat and in our Top Tips below you will learn how to create an environment that encourages your own experiences of peace and stillness.

Take time to be with the stillness and quiet this Winter and always.

It is always with you.

Selina

Editor
Director, The Prison Phoenix Trust



***"Set aside all
involvements and let the
myriad things rest"***

Zen Master Dogen,
1200-1253

Top Tips

How to create a calm environment

1. We cannot shut out all the noise, but we can turn off the TV.
2. Tidy and clean our space. This might help your head feel clearer too.
3. Get some fresh air by opening a window if we can.
4. Find something from nature and put it in front of you. A leaf, feather, flower or a stone.
5. Park or write down anything that is playing on your mind before you start.
6. Gather a blanket to lie on, or keep you warm in relaxation and pillows to use as support. Have your chair in a position where you feel comfortable and can plant your feet on the ground.
7. Write to The Prison Phoenix Trust for guidance.

***"Sit still and turn your
mind to the light"***

Unnamed, HMP Haverigg



For a good night's sleep

by Chris

This sequence prepares us for sleep by gently stretching out areas of tension, lowering our heart rate and helping our nerves to settle. It is all done on the ground.

You do not need a yoga mat - but you could put a blanket underneath you for softness. Pillows, folded towels or blankets are used to support the body in each position, allowing you to rest deeply without any strain. Do poses 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 lying on one side first, and then roll over and do them on the other side.

1



Shoulder release

Lie with a tightly rolled towel placed under your head and upper spine. Stay 5 mins.

2



Supported back bend

Lie with folded towel placed under your upper back. Stay 5 mins.

3



Flowing twist (a)

Lie on side with knees tucked and arms straight out in front.

4



Flowing twist (b)

Slide top hand over chest to open out arms and upper body. Return hands together. Repeat x5.

5



Supported arm circles (a)

Lying on side, sweep top arm in large circles above head and around body. Repeat x5 in one direction.

6



Supported arm circles (b)

Repeat arm circles in the other direction x5.

7



Side rock

Lying on side, gently rock by pressing a hand against the ground.

8



Seated forward bend (a)

Sit on ground with bent knees supported by pillow(s), then rock forwards.

9



Seated forward bend (b)

Place more pillows or folded towel or clothes on lap to support your upper body. Rest for 5 mins.

10



Table top

Press into hands and feet to lift body away from the ground. Stay 5 breaths.

11



Floating egg

Sitting, hug knees into chest, lift feet off floor, closing eyes if comfortable. Stay 5 breaths.

12



Legs up rest

Lie on your back with lower legs supported by chair or bed. Rest for 5 mins.

“Scheduled worry time makes me not feel as if I am ignoring my feelings, but also not letting them keep me awake”

Anon, HMP High Down

Tips

- For shoulder release, rolled towel goes no lower than the bottom of your shoulder blades
- For supported back bend, head and tops of shoulders are on ground above the folded towel
- When lying on side, place pillow under head for comfort
- When circling arm, let its weight rest into the ground
- For table top, head can stay lifted or rest back

Cautions

- Go gently - do not push
- Move within pain-free range of movement
- If something hurts, ease off!
- At the end, roll gently onto your side before sitting up again

Breathing plays a central role in yoga and meditation. Every breath is new and unique.

What do you notice?



1
Place your hands on your lower belly. Breathe in and out. Notice any movement. Explore this for 5 breaths.



2
Rest your hands on your lower rib cage, feel it expand and relax. Breathe in and out for 5 breaths.



3
Bring your hands onto your upper chest. Feel the rise and fall. Take 5 breaths here.



4
Notice each movement from belly to upper chest as you breathe in and out for 5 more breaths.

Cautions

- Don't do this if you feel unwell, have a respiratory condition, or blocked nose.
- Stop and rest if you feel dizzy, short of breath or unwell at any time.
- Don't overdo it. Try once a day for 5 to 10 minutes.

Tips

- Try to breathe in and out through your nose, if possible.
- Take some rest breaths between each step.
- Breathe slowly, gradually filling and emptying your lungs.
- You can try this exercise lying down too.

“Silence is deep as Eternity; Speech is shallow as time.”

Thomas Carlyle,
Scottish Historian (1800s)



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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. We have recently received funds in memory of: Douglas Denny, J. Edwards, and Caroline Irwin.