

# Lighter Days



From HMP Send

**'I cannot wait to get stuck in to all of it. I have heard so many positive stories.'**

See page 3

'It is insane how much difference it makes.' Like many of our readers, this person had never tried yoga before. Feeling stuck in a dark place? On these pages you will read all sorts of different experiences that show how yoga can help us to feel lighter and brighter in our bodies, minds, and in our hearts too.

We do not force this to happen. Just like we do not make Spring happen or force Winter to end. When the conditions are right, Spring blossoms. But we do have to dedicate time each day to nurture our best selves through movement and our breath. We are preparing the conditions for our own Spring so that a fresh perspective can flourish.

At HMP Gartree, one prisoner lost his way during Covid and now — with 4 hours of yoga a week and meditation each night — is back to feeling active, studying, and leading others with their own practice. Another at HMP Dartmoor, by practising 30 minutes of sun salutations daily, is 'ready to face anything'. Setting time aside each day to practise helps. He starts with his sun salutations every morning after making his bed. Someone else at HMP Send is starting out with 10 minutes a day and she is determined to be persistent.

It helps physical and mental health when we make daily life our yoga, weaving it in to our day-to-day. When we notice how we are feeling, and where we have aches and pains, we can actively and gently incorporate techniques that might help us.

**Continue reading on page 5**

*Love from us all*

*Selina, Chris, Lou, Padmakumara, Sebastian, 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 trauma-responsive approach 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:

### Your 30-Day Challenge!

Try yoga or meditation for 30 days

Page 3



### Neck, Shoulder, and Back Relaxer

Ease tension in the body

Pages 6-7



### Breathing out Anxiety

Anxious? Try this simple 4:6 breathing exercise.

Page 8

# Letters

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

## From HMP Dartmoor

I have spent the last 3 months unemployed due to lack of work placements here. So, rather than look at this time negatively, I took the opportunity to practise my yoga and even more so my meditation. It has kept me positive and calm during what could have been a hard time.

I have now started part-time English classes. And today I had to do a 10-minute speech. So I chose to talk about my journey practising yoga and how it has enlightened me to become the best version of myself.

It obviously went down very well, as we went for our break straight after for 20 mins on the yard, and I was still answering questions the whole break.

## From HMP Wandsworth

It has been a while, 2018 I think was the last time you sent me some yoga and meditation info. Boy did I use it, still use it very much today, and it has properly saved me more than once.

I do yoga 365 days a year. Do not know what I would do without it now. Love my yoga and meditation night and day!

P.S. Even started my solicitor doing some light yoga and meditation, how good is that! Life saver!

## From HMP Onley

I am trying to keep my mental health strong and my body. It also relaxes me and helps me to stay positive. I want to be my best self.

## From HMP Dartmoor

I am nearly 65. Yes, I have kept fit and active, but my joints and muscles were definitely groaning with age, wear and tear. With the help of yoga, I am now far more flexible, supple and better able to cope with regular gym and circuit training. My mental agility and strength and will power have also improved. I am also much more able to keep calm and breathe through various challenging situations.

During the last 12 months I have also been going through a difficult divorce and other proceedings which have caused me emotional strain, stress and at times despair. Daily yoga kept demons away.

Yoga practice morning and evening has, I believe, helped save me and get me through each day in a better, more positive, resilient manner.

Pretty much without exception, I get up everyday and after a quick drink, make my bed, and then I religiously do the Sun Salutation. This takes about 30 minutes, it clears my mind, stimulates my body and grey cells. I can face pretty much anything. I am ready to go, calm, friendly, awake, focussed.

In the evening, most days, I try to do another 30-60 minutes of about a dozen different poses. This depends on how tired I am, if I have been to the gym, and therefore the intensity varies.

Yoga and The PPT will now always be a part of my life force.

## From HMP Erlestoke

I have recently taken up yoga and meditation and have limited resources available to me at this present moment of time. I am a recovering drug addict and have found since taking up these it has helped tenfold, not only with my recovery but also with a lot of my mental health issues.

## From HMP Send

I am a beginner with all this yoga and meditation stuff, but I cannot wait to get stuck in to all of it. I have heard so many positive stories of how yoga has helped many many women in prison.

I suffer with bad anxiety and I feel like my next step in my journey is yoga/meditation! I have done some today. Only 10 minutes but some of the poses are very tricky! But I will be persistent and keep on trying. I am not a quitter! I have done the sun salute one and really enjoyed it!

## From HMP Gartree

I got lost in the weeds during Covid, not really keeping up either yoga or meditation sadly.

However, I am back to my previous activity levels and very regular sessions. About four hours of yoga a week, with a meditation slot each night to review the day and shut down.

Funny thing, I know – and I am an example of the benefits of regular practice on mind and body – still did not keep at it over Covid. I just got so bored and low. I hardly got out of bed by mid 2020. Shock horror both my physical and mental health took a pounding. Depression, gaining 25kg – boy did I get fat!! Comfort eating – great idea!

Who knew? Knowing and doing being very different things. 18 months later I am being back to pre-Covid weight 77kg and counting. Really active, back studying, regular practice and also once more teaching yoga twice a week. One regular session and one advanced class, both full with waiting lists.

**Our yoga and meditation radio programme, *Freedom Inside*, is no longer on air at the usual time.**

We would like to thank National Prison Radio for hosting our programme, and to all of you who listened.

**National Prison Radio**

JOIN US!

**Yoga30**  
Challenge

## Yoga 30 Challenge 2024

**This year our challenge takes place from 21st May, World Meditation Day, until the 19th June.**

The challenge is to practise yoga or meditation for 30 days. You can do both if you like!

You could try to do some of the exercises from this newsletter, or write to us and ask for handouts with different yoga activities.

We are all excited to challenge ourselves. Fill in the form below and let us know what you will be doing this year for your Yoga 30 Challenge!

## Tell us what yoga or meditation you will be doing

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prison number (if in custody) \_\_\_\_\_

Address or prison \_\_\_\_\_

Email (if available) \_\_\_\_\_

30 day activity \_\_\_\_\_

If people would like to sponsor you, they can make a donation through our Just Giving page.

To find out how to donate you can contact us:  
**The PPT, PO Box 328,  
Oxford, OX2 7HF**



## Your Calendar

|    |        |    |     |    |        |    |
|----|--------|----|-----|----|--------|----|
|    | 21 May | 22 | 23  | 24 | 25     | 26 |
| 27 | 28     | 29 | 30  | 31 | 1 June | 2  |
| 3  | 4      | 5  | 6   | 7  | 8      | 9  |
| 10 | 11     | 12 | 13  | 14 | 15     | 16 |
| 17 | 18     | 19 | 🏆🏆🏆 |    |        |    |

### Use this calendar to keep track of your progress

If you miss a day, just try again! Try to do 30 days, but do whatever feels right and listen to your body.

We will all be doing it too, so please write in and let us know how you get on.

The PPT, PO Box 328,  
Oxford, OX2 7HF

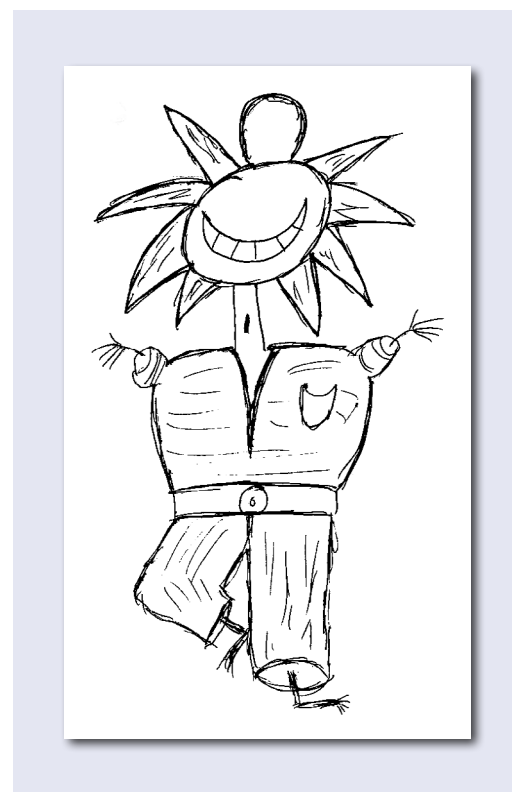
### Our Top Tips for the Yoga 30 Challenge

1. Plan exactly when you will practise. First thing in the morning, or before sleeping at night, work well for some.
2. Choose the practices you enjoy or make you feel better. Write to us for a pack of our practice sheets you could try, or do the practices featured here. You choose.
3. Keep a record using the chart above. If you miss a day, just try again the next day.
4. Let others know how you are getting on: friends on your wing or ward. Or write to us and let us know how you are doing or for help and guidance.

### From HMP Isle of Man

Honestly, I had never tried yoga before coming to prison. I have totally fallen in love with yoga. It is insane how much difference it makes. I feel so much more relaxed after doing yoga. I feel more connected with my body. It has given me a more spiritual feel.

I am hugely struggling being away from my young children. They mean the world to me and my mental health took a major hit throughout my sentencing and even more so once getting sent to jail. Yoga has helped me stop stressing so much. It clears my head on the bad days. I look forward to continuing my journey with your support and yoga will continue to be a part of my life once I am released. I am excited to show my children all your resources and encourage them to join me when I finally get home.



Artwork from HMP Gartree

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



## Lighter Days

Continued from page 1

The practices featured in these pages are all simple tools we can use in the midst of life. I often do a few shoulder rolls as I walk. And sometimes, if I am awake at night with a lot on my mind, the back page 4:6 breathing technique helps me drift back to sleep.

Try taking part in our Yoga 30 Challenge to establish a regular practice for yourself. Set realistic goals to make getting started more achievable. Like building up from 1 minute a day doing the 4:6 breath practice on the back page, or spending 10 minutes releasing tension each morning in your neck, shoulders, and back following the sequence on pages 6 and 7.

By taking time each day nourishing ourselves, we allow our own Spring time to come. Being open to the potential for fresh energy and hope that is within us all gives it the space to spring forth.

Good luck with your Yoga 30 Challenge!

Selina

Editor

Director, The Prison Phoenix Trust



### Top Tips Firebreak - Taking a Pause

Stuck in your head? Worrying or anxious? Lost in anger or frustration? Try this mindfulness technique to pause and reset:

1. Feel the ground under your feet. Scrunch and relax your toes.
2. Breathe in and out slowly and deliberately.
3. Relax shoulders.
4. Keep breathing slowly.
5. Relax jaw. Unclench teeth. Soften face.
6. Keep breathing slowly.
7. Clench and relax hands.
8. Keep going until you feel the intensity has passed.

Practise this at a set time each day, so when you need help to reset, you can take a mindful break.

Write to us at The Prison Phoenix Trust for guidance.



# Neck, Shoulder, and Back Relaxer

These simple stretches help ease tension in your body. If you are feeling tense or stressed, your body feels it too. Breathe slowly and deeply, noticing the sensations. By focusing in this way it can give your mind a rest from all the things bothering you.

1a



1b



1c



## Neck tilts

5 slow deep breaths, both sides.  
Stretch gently and slowly.  
Be mindful of how your neck feels.

4



## Back Stretch

Find a ledge to rest hands on.  
Fold over.  
Keep neck in line with back.  
5 deep breaths.

5



## Shoulder Stretch

Clasp hands behind back.  
Let head hang loose.  
Lift arms away.  
Stay for 5 breaths.

6



## Home Pose

Curl inward.  
Rest head on hands or fists if helpful.  
Knees together or apart.  
5 slow steady breaths.

2



## Eagle

Cross forearms.  
Lift to shoulder height.  
5 slow steady breaths.  
Change sides.

3



## Cow Face

Hands behind back.  
5 slow steady breaths, both sides.  
A sock or towel can help join the hands.

7



## Floor Twist

Drop knees to side.  
Open arms sideways, if space.  
Twist to look over opposite shoulder.  
Stay for 5 slow steady breaths or longer, then swap sides.

8



## Rest

Get comfortable.  
Tense and relax jaw, shoulders, hands, and feet.  
Feel breath flowing in and out.  
Count each breath or enjoy the quiet.  
Stay for 5 minutes or as long as you like.

## Tips

- Try this every day.
- Use steps 1 to 5 as a warm up before longer sequences.
- A pillow might help with the Floor Twist.

## Cautions

- Listen to your body as you move and breathe. You are in charge.
- You choose how long feels right.
- If it hurts, stop.

*‘Whoever possesses God in their being, has him in a divine manner, and he shines out to them in all things.’*

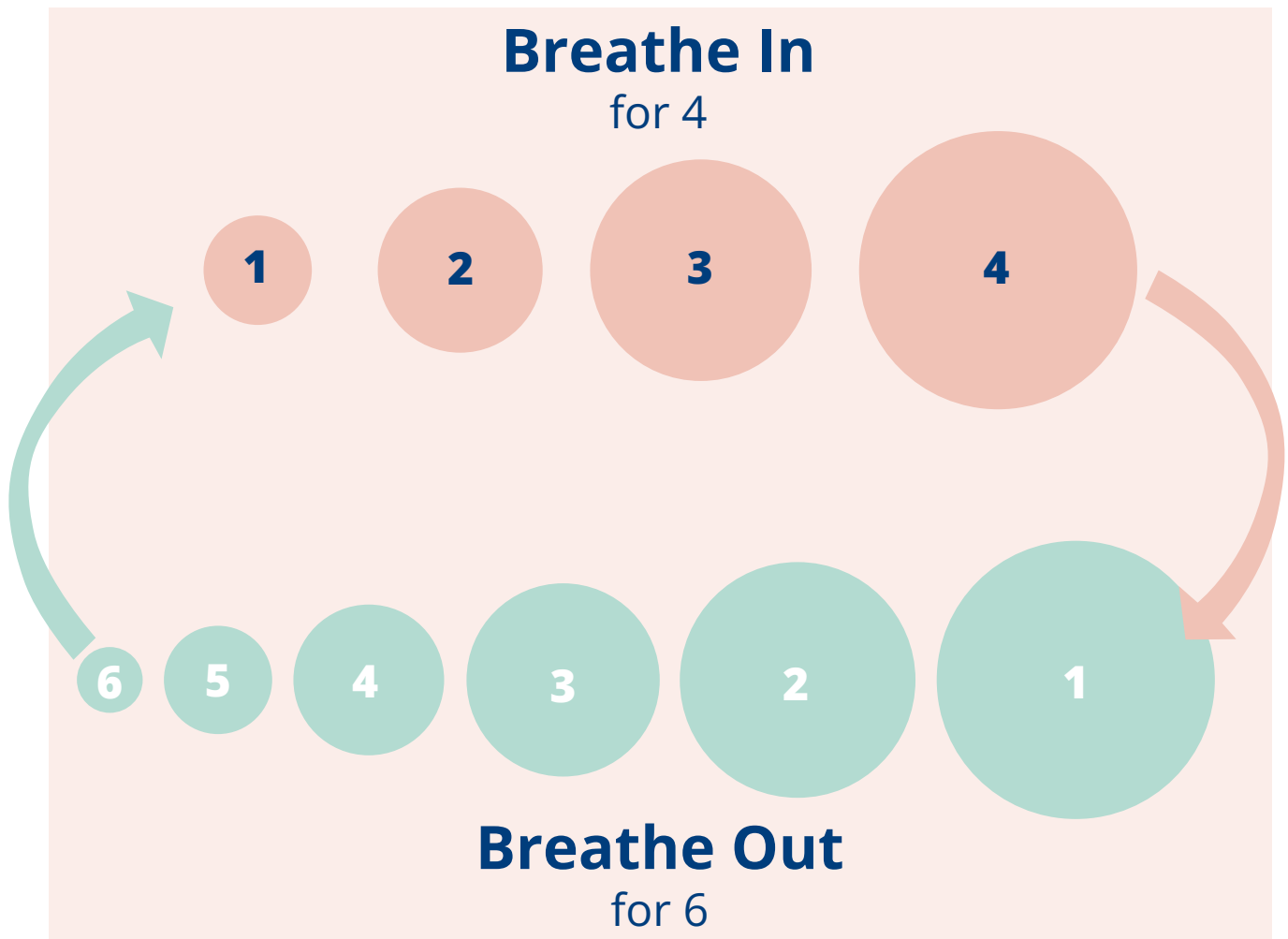
— Meister Eckhart, Catholic theologian, philosopher, and mystic

*‘You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming.’*

— Pablo Neruda, Chilean poet



- 4:6 breathing technique
- Breathe in deeply for 4 counts and longer out for 6 counts, repeat
- Do anywhere



## Tips

- Trace your finger along the picture to help.
- Breathe through your nose (if you can).
- Create a positive habit by practising every day.
- Use as a tool when you need it.

## Cautions

- Do not hold your breath.
- If it does not feel helpful, stop.
- Build up gradually to 10 minutes.
- Breathe through mouth if you wish.