



# Waking up



## Welcome.

"Yoga is the crutch I never thought I needed." One of the people we support at HMP Grendon noticed how all the ideas he had previously about yoga fell by the wayside. He encourages others to take the plunge. Read more on pages 2 & 3 to see how others have woken up with yoga, like a writer at HMP Foston Hall who feels "alive again."

We can think of waking up to yoga as practising first thing in the morning. It also reflects how we wake up to our true selves. A yoga practitioner who has been taking part in yoga classes at HMP Forest Bank recognises "I am much calmer than my former self." Much more than stretching and physical exercise, practising meditation and yoga helps us gradually get to know ourselves better. Not just about whether we can touch our toes, it can help relax our minds, so we can wake up to our true nature.

When we take time to practise meditation and be present with our experience in yoga, we let the light of clear perception in to reveal our true essence and connection to others. Going slowly and sensitively, yoga teaches us how to be kind to ourselves.

From Foston Hall,  
**"My back pain  
is on the mend.  
I feel alive  
again."**

See page 2

The yoga sequence on pages 6 and 7 (Yoga for a Strong Back) has instructions to approach movement in a way that develops this ability to be kinder to ourselves. "Do not do this if you are in pain. Go gently, focusing on the breath and if it hurts, stop and rest." It is the opposite to a boot camp, pushing through pain and resistance.

Continue reading on page 5.

*Love from us all  
Selina, Chris, Lou, Padmakumara, Sebastian, Victoria,  
and all our volunteers*

**The Prison Phoenix Trust** supports people's spiritual lives in prison 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 people living and working in secure environments through written mentoring, books, CDs, DVDs, newsletters, free taster workshops, and weekly classes.

## See inside:

### Your 30-Day Challenge!

Try yoga or meditation for 30 days  
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### Yoga for your back

Yoga poses to help strengthen your back muscles

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### Walking meditation

Calm your mind

Page 8

# Letters

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

## From HMP Forest Bank

September 2023

I have really got into yoga over the last 9 months, I come out of my yoga class feeling great. Our tutor here at Forest Bank is fantastic, I really look forward to my class, I love the relaxation and meditation part of the practice, **I come out of that session, feeling brand new, and stress free.**

January 2024

Yoga is now a part of me and what I do. And I intend to keep it up out here.

I really believe my practices over time have made me a better person. I am much calmer than my former self.

## From a volunteer at The PPT

I just thought I would share a small snippet with you. I had to go for an MRI Scan on Friday and even though I had had one a few years ago, I had forgotten how claustrophobic one can feel inside the scanner. I did feel a momentary panic as I was pushed in.

However, I had already determined to use the 4:6 breathing technique which I started immediately and I noticed the difference within seconds. What a help that was and at the end, the Radiographer commented on how calm and still I had been. Thank you for giving us this.

## From onward Life

It [meditation and yoga] reaches the whole person, the inner self. It gives focus and purpose, is non-judgemental and creates a mindset to not only survive prison but to thrive as a new person.

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



We asked you:

**Why do you want to learn more about meditation and yoga?**

You said:

To utilise my time wisely and find a better hobby than addiction.

From HMP Holme House

For my inner peace and strength and also to be able to expand my knowledge and if possible teach others.

From HMP Stafford

I love doing it, it makes me feel on top of the world.

From HMP Styal



Unnamed Artist, Secure Premises

## From HMP Foston Hall

I do yoga twice a day and the energy I have is amazing. My back pain is on the mend I feel alive again. Plus it made me want to eat better and do a lot of healthy thinking, so I am very thankful for the CDs and book.

## From HMP Altcourse

I am really enjoying meditation. It relaxes me so much. I am sorry I never started it when I was outside, it is so good for the mind. I certainly will be carrying it on when I do get out. I am even trying it when I wake up at 6am.

## Saturday Morning Yoga

### From HMP Grendon

Yoga is the crutch I never thought I needed. Right from the start when the primary reason for practising was to augment gym workouts, it has been a constant presence rather like a favourite teddy bear or mug. It has been much more than a stretching interlude, a mere means to an end. Calling it a way of life would not be an overstatement. 'I am a human being, not a human doing' – one of the many sayings delivered by our yoga teacher, that I've come to adopt over the years.

All the preconceptions I had about yoga have fallen by the wayside including the most common – that you need to be more bendy than average in order to do it properly. You learn through practise that not only are we all different, but our bodies also respond differently at different times, and that there's a yoga pose for every occasion. **Take the plunge, otherwise how will you ever know?**

The yoga class runs every Saturday morning from 9:30am until 11am. We usually follow the same format with a short check in at the beginning and a brief conversation about yoga terminology and ideas. Then we will move into a breathing practice, stretching and then a sun salute. A sun salute is a series of yoga poses put together into a sequence. Finally we will complete the session with a relaxation period, meditation, and occasionally a poem with thought-provoking elements.



JOIN US!



**Our Yoga 30 Challenge has just started! Join us by trying out 30 days of yoga and meditation.**

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

**Write in for a set of practise sheets or to tell us what yoga or meditation you are doing**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

☐ Please send me a set of practise sheets

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**



# Yoga30 Challenge

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



## Use this calendar to keep track of your progress

You can start from today. Try to do 30 days, but do whatever feels right and listen to your body.

We are all doing it too. Please write in and let us know how you get on.

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

## Your Yoga30 Challenges

### Read others' pledges!

Adding different positions at intervals throughout the 30 days as new to yoga and build a routine.

From HMP Winchester

Meditation, sun salutation, and handout/newsletter activities.

From HMP Barlinnie

To start doing my daily yoga first thing each day.

From HMP Rochester

I will try alternating meditation and yoga. 1 day meditate, 1 day yoga, fingers crossed all goes well.

From HMP Chelmsford

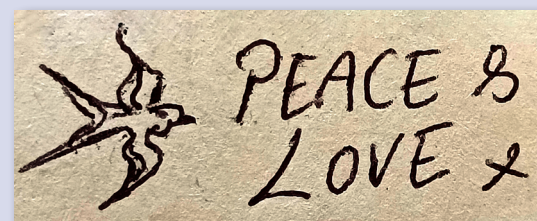
## From HMP Parc

February 2024

I have been quite stressed out with it all, and still not seeing an end to the whole issue. Meditation has gotten more back on track, I do not know what changed, but it literally changed over 5 minutes on Friday from feeling really low, to all of a sudden going 'I am feeling slightly better, let's keep a hold of that and give myself a (metaphorical) kick up the backside.'

March 2024

I am not feeling as anxious as I was last letter, and have been continuing with the meditating and lying on the floor and an easy yoga exercise. When I am having the moments of anxiety, **focusing on the breath does help to regain some calm.** Trying to ignore everything/ everyone around me and focus on my breathing. When I can, I go back to the cell, turn the light off and sit there focusing.



From onward life

## From HMP Preston

They have now made me Neurodiversity Rep for my wing and I am using some of the practices in your book to assist in helping people relax their minds.

I aim to develop and continue this support in the hope my work will spread into this institution and help prisoners with all manner of issues to cope inside and out.

## From HMP Cardiff

I am really struggling with self-control and find being still in the quiet helpful. Also the yoga helps with flexibility and sleeping.

# Waking up

Continued from page 1

In yoga and meditation, we want to explore and be curious about our feelings of resistance to shed light on them. This gentler approach is certainly not 'soft'. **It takes courage to be with ourselves and learn how to be with it all.** Another practitioner wrote in to say they feel "on top of the world"; our persistence opens a door to energy and joy.

People of different faiths relate to the idea of waking up in a spiritual sense. In Islam it involves cultivating a strong connection with Allah (God) and may include experiencing a sense of inner peace and tranquillity. Christians may describe waking up spiritually as receiving the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment for living a life aligned to God's purpose. Enlightenment is the term used by Buddhists to describe an experience of awakening to recognise one's true nature and, in Hinduism, it involves realising divine nature. Common to all faiths and those without a faith background is the recognition of the value of presence for deep connection.

Some are motivated to build a new way of life. Someone at HMP Holme House said they wanted "to utilise my time wisely and find a better hobby than addiction." As we practise yoga and meditation, we tap into the energy of life, seeing with new clarity and aligning to true nature.

Selina

Editor

Director, The Prison Phoenix Trust



## Top Tips

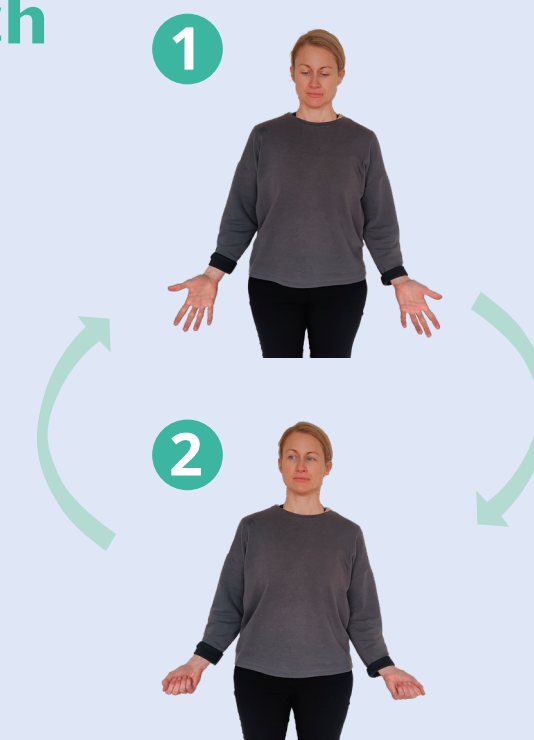
# Exploring our breath

**Meditation and yoga are both based on being aware of our breathing. Try this to explore what your breathing feels like.**

1. **Breathe in** opening hands
2. **Breathe out** closing hands.
3. **Repeat** this, noticing the air filling your body and flowing out.
4. You can also try breathing out as you open your hands, and breathing in as you close or clench your hands

**There is no right or wrong way to feel.**

**Notice your own breathing.**



# Yoga for a Strong Back

by Chris

Strengthening the back muscles can help to prevent injuries and the aches and pains that come with sleeping on a thin mattress. You do not need a yoga mat – a towel or blanket is fine.

1



## Cat/Cow

Hands and knees.  
Tuck tailbone and chin to round back. Stay for up to 5 breaths.  
Dip back and lift head for up to 5 breaths too.

2



## Lie on Front

Pause and relax your back and body.

3



## Locust prep

Lift and lengthen left arm and right leg for up to 5 breaths.

4



## Locust prep

Lift and lengthen right arm and left leg for up to 5 breaths.

5



## Upper locust

Link fingers behind back.  
Raise chest.  
Stay lifted for up to 5 breaths.  
Then rest on your front for 5 breaths.

6



## Lower locust

Place hands under front of hips.  
Raise legs for up to 5 breaths.  
Rest on your front for 5 breaths.

7



## Full locust

Reach arms in front.  
Raise arms and legs together for up to 5 breaths.  
Rest on your front for 5 breaths.

8



## Plank

Place hands under shoulders.  
Tuck toes under.  
Push hands into floor to lift upper body. Engage core.  
Push into heels to lift lower body. Stay for up to 5 breaths.

9



## Cobra

Place hands under shoulders.  
Use back muscles to raise upper body. Stay for up to 5 breaths.

10



## Cat

Hands and knees.  
Tuck tailbone and chin to round back. Stay for up to 5 breaths.

11



## Home

Rest elbows and forehead down.  
Drop seat towards heels.  
Stay for up to 5 breaths.

12



## Recover/Rest

Lie on your back.  
Rest back muscles.  
Eyes open or closed, stay for around 10 minutes.

## Cautions

- Do not do this if you are in pain, or have sciatica or a slipped disc.
- Go gently focusing on your breathing.
- If it hurts, stop & rest.

*“Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.”*

Philip Larkin, Poet

For more of our yoga sequences, look out for our articles in Inside Time newspaper

**insidetime**  
the National Newspaper for Prisoners & Detainees

## Tips

- Place a towel or blanket on the floor.
- Choose how long to remain in each position, up to 5 breaths.
- Then spend a few minutes or more in sitting or walking meditation (see back page).

# Walking Meditation

by Selina

- Slower movement to help calm your mind and body
- Good for restlessness and focus
- Practise anywhere

1. Look at the ground a short distance ahead.

2. Relax face.

3. Hands together, left hand over right

Or hands down by sides.



Focus on **slow, steady breathing** and **feeling your feet on the ground** with each step.

- Walk at a slower pace.
- Go clockwise if doing circuits.
- Try it outdoors.



## Cautions

- Check your space is clear with no trip hazards.

## Tips

- When your mind wanders, bring it back to walking and breathing.
- If you want to add seated meditation, start with 5 minutes of walking first, sit for 1 minute, then repeat.

**May your good Spirit lead me on level ground.**

Psalm 143, *The Bible*



P.O. Box 328, Oxford OX2 7HF  
[www.theppt.org.uk](http://www.theppt.org.uk)

Registered charity no. 1163558

*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 Elizabeth Avery.*