

Clearing the Way



Welcome

Have you ever noticed how clearing a bit of space, tidying your bed area or cutting back an overgrown plant, can help you feel a bit less messy, crowded and tangled inside too? Just like plants need pruning to grow stronger and flower, we also need a bit of clearing now and then to feel lighter, brighter, and more alive.

This autumn, we may not get outside to clear the overgrowth, but we can turn our attention inward. Yoga and meditation help us clear space in our minds and hearts, so we feel a little steadier, a little more at peace, even in the middle of difficult surroundings. One reader (page 3) finds his outer world cannot take away his peace and inner resilience.

In yoga philosophy, there is an old idea that each of us is made of three parts: stillness or inertia (tamas), energy or activity (rajas), and balance or clarity (sattva). One of these is usually in charge. When we feel stuck, low, or heavy (that's tamas), we often need some gentle energy (rajas) to shift us forward. This leads us toward balance (sattva), where we feel more peaceful and aware. Think of it like a seed (tamas), growing upwards like a strong tree (rajas), and blooming into flower (sattva).

Yoga follows that same journey. We start with movement to wake up our body and mind. Then we sit still in meditation. From stillness to movement to deep stillness again, but this time with more awareness and openness. In this newsletter we guide you through this.

Continue reading on page 4

Love from us all

Selina, Chris, De, Dervla, Emma, Hetty, Imogen, Lou, Lucy, Padmakumara, Rebecca, 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.

Lisa writes

"They told me I could breathe. They told me I could move. They told me I could sit still in the storm and find a speck of peace."

See page 4

See inside:

Peace Inside

"Your book has saved me from my negative self."

Order your FREE copy
Page 3



Onward Life

Prison to parliament

Lisa shares her moving journey and a message of hope - "Hold on. Breathe. Move. You are not alone."

Page 4

Breathing for calm

A soothing breath sequence to calm and balance agitated minds

Page 8



Letters

Thank you to those kindly sharing their experiences with us to help others.

From HMP Wymott

Stress has been my enemy for longer than I care to remember. Along with its good friends lack of confidence and low self-esteem. Thankfully though, over the last 2 years of recall I have been working to contend with all 3.

I am much better and calmer within myself. I am really getting the hang of this breathing meditation and on a couple of occasions now I have been able to completely lose myself in the moment. Being in a single cell is very helpful too when it comes down to it as there is less chance of being disturbed. I have to be honest, on the odd occasion I have been too head-busy to meditate and given up through frustration. I found it easier to not partake than force it. Later on, when I had chilled out, which is mainly after some yoga, I am able to go and meditate.

Just being able to not worry about 'what if' and 'maybe' is a huge relief for me as they are my biggest problems. If only I knew then what I know now. Saying that though, I would not have experienced the journey and realisation. I believe that there is a reason for everything to happen the way it does and I have had to walk the path set out before me so I could become the man I am today. You are a part of that journey and I thank you for your company and long may it continue.



From HMP The Verne

I do twenty minutes of a combination of yoga stretching exercises every morning before breakfast, including breathing exercises. I started doing these during Covid in 2020 and have felt it helps to keep me trim as well as supple, ready for the day ahead.

I often use yoga to help with digestion and getting sleep at night.

From HMP Littlehey

For the last ten years I have engaged in yoga sessions, and here at Littlehey we have an amazing yoga teacher who comes into the prison every week to teach, and the positive impact it has had on my mental health and wellbeing is immeasurable. We run meditation on our wing and I have become a member of the Buddhist group.



From HMP Whatton

Song of breath

At ease with all within and without
untie the knots of muscles and nerves
let go of resistance and remain receptive
clinging not to elation or despair
When the quest for answers naturally declines
all questions will fall of their own accord
Let wonder direct your empty presence
let space be filled with blissful being
Return home and abide into fathomable splendour
the timeless lotus greets you in oneness

From HMP Parc

I have recently read your book Peace Inside, provided from the prison chaplain. It has inspired me to learn more about yoga, body and spirit.

A little bit about myself. I am a young lad who is ¾ of the way through his sentence. I got recalled for self-harm, I have struggle ever since to feel connected as I felt hard done by. Your book has saved me from my negative self.

HMP

I have been reading Peace Inside, it brings back old memories from when I had the same book in 2020.

At the time and even now I wish I had been more mindful. I used to do a lot of things without thinking about consequences or safety of others.

I love spirituality. The 4:6 breathing helps and I have noticed the amount of tension I have built up especially in my shoulders and neck. I try body scan techniques. Release the tension and it is amazing what breathing can do for someone who tries to be the breath.

The outer world has nothing to give it can only take. But one thing it cannot take is my peace and inner resilience.

From HMP La Moye

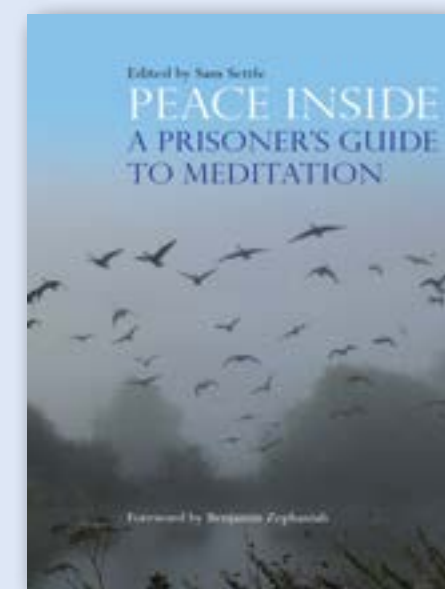
Thank you for my very own copy of Peace Inside, 'Thank you' is not enough, it is more than that, I cannot say enough. 😊 Thank you for the tips on breathing for calm, I loved the other 2 too, you are right they are powerful in their simplicity, as is meditation itself.

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



Read for yourself what everyone's writing about and experience...

Peace Inside A prisoner's guide to meditation



"Your book has saved me from my negative self. Thank You."



Peace Inside
Order your own **FREE** copy

Name _____

Prisoner Number (if in custody) _____

Job Title (if staff) _____

Name of prison or establishment

Return to: **The PPT, P.O. Box 328,
Oxford OX2 7HF**

May meditation retreat day



In May, we gathered for a day of meditation, inviting our community to join us by sharing the structure, sequences and talks with those practising alongside us, wherever they were. We shared our practice and listened to a reader's story. His message resonated with many of you and the shared practice built a strong sense of connection.

From HMP La Moye

I did the 10th May meditation, I loved the reader's letter a lot, and I listened to your Radio 4 appeal on the Sunday. I was imagining people everywhere in all kinds of places, it was a joyous spiritual community to be in, the pack arrived just in time, THANK YOU.

"The shared practice built a strong sense of connection."

Onward Life

Thank you for the Meditation Retreat Day.

I was grateful for the sheets of asanas (postures) – I have got used to my own routine, and it was very handy to get some fresh guidance. It also reminded me that whether alone in my flat, or alone in my cell, The PPT is there for me; so I was not alone during the retreat after all.

The reader's reflection would have been tough reading had I not already lived with several similar people during my short time inside. And I agree with his statement – growth is always painful. And humiliating. I have just applied for a job, and am not looking forward to discussing my offences, if I am lucky enough to get an interview. And he is right: 'carry on'.

Lisa, Onward Life

From prison to parliament

In May The Prison Phoenix Trust was invited to a round-table discussion in the Houses of Parliament aimed at shaping policy for women in prison. Joining our team was Lisa, who writes about her experience:

From prison cell to Parliament... and all it took was a complete mental breakdown, a handful of handwritten letters, and a few downward dogs in a 6x8. (Well... maybe a little more than that, but it sounds good for the purpose of this post!)

Many years ago, I was completely losing the plot. Twisted up in shame and fear. Detoxing off methadone in a prison cell with zero support, zero structure, and zero hope.

My mind was spiralling and silence was a luxury—inside and out. Then, a letter arrived. Handwritten. Personal. From a charity I reached out to: The Prison Phoenix Trust.

They told me I could breathe. They told me I could move. They told me I could sit still in the storm and find a speck of peace.

I started practising yoga on my cell floor, surrounded by noise and chaos, my body weak but my will quietly rebuilding. Since then, I have never let go of The PPT. Or perhaps, they never let go of me.

And now—by some surreal twist of fate—I am heading into the Houses of Parliament to represent this beautiful, stubbornly passionate, heart-led charity at a roundtable discussion hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Sport and Physical Activity in the Criminal Justice System.

I am honoured to be bringing not just my lived experience, but also the voices of countless women who have sat in those same cells, aching to move, to feel, to heal.

Movement saved me. Meditation saved me. Handwritten letters saved me.

Turning my personal shit-show into some small source of service is the greatest privilege of my life.

To those still trapped 'inside', still struggling with self doubt... Hold on. Breathe. Move.

You are not alone.



Clearing the Way

Continued from page 1

Begin with a calming breathing practice, (see back page) to switch your nervous system from high alert (fight or flight) into its resting mode, where your body can digest not just food, but emotions too. Just 5 rounds can make a real difference. After that, try some yoga movements, to ease tight muscles and help tension and emotion shift. Someone we support (page 2) says yoga helps him feel more ready for the day.

The final step is meditation. After movement, it is often easier to sit quietly. You might still feel heavy or quiet inside; that is okay. That stillness, when chosen and steady, can be the most peaceful place of all, where our head and heart reconnect and our life blooms.

One reader uses the metaphor of a clam to explain how his heart felt closed tight shut from childhood, but how yoga and breath cracked it open. Now even when something emotional happens, it never fully clams shut again. He encourages others to keep going: 'Growth is always painful, but what comes out from that pain is something brighter, more vivid, more loving.' His advice: 'Carry on. When things get tough, carry on. When things are beautiful, carry on. Just do not stop.'

This autumn, as trees shed their leaves, perhaps yoga can help you let go of the things that do not serve you; clear the way for renewal and something brighter.

Selina
Editor
CEO, The Prison Phoenix Trust

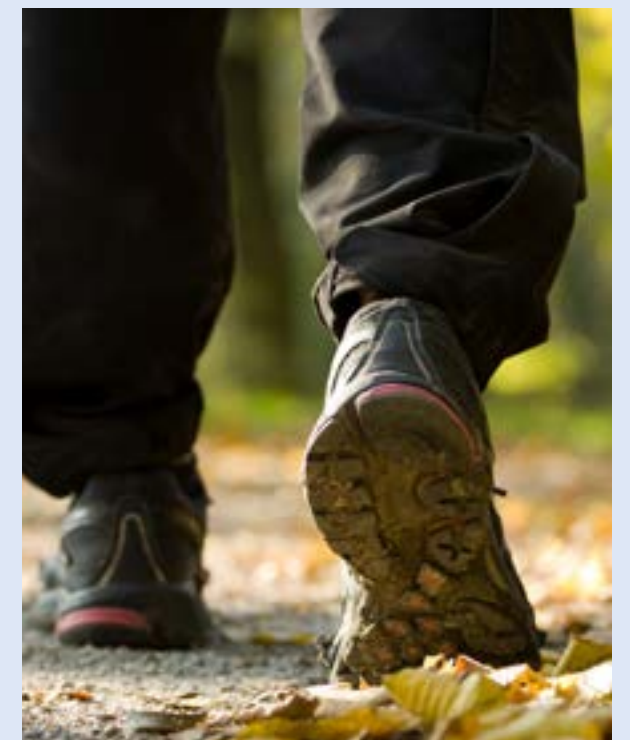


Top Tips

A reader's tips to help manage life

1. Take it steady, not all at once
2. Make a timetable
3. Take regular breaks when things get tough, or your mood drops because you are tired
4. Walk - anytime, anywhere. Turn it into a moving meditation
5. Do not knock it until you have tried it, you might be pleasantly surprised
6. Help others, be useful. What can I do to help?
7. Get creative - do a craft
Knitting, crochet, drawing...
8. Remember there are people who care about you (We do - The PPT 😊)

Thank you for this advice



by Lou

- Shift your mood
- Feel more grounded
- Gain focus

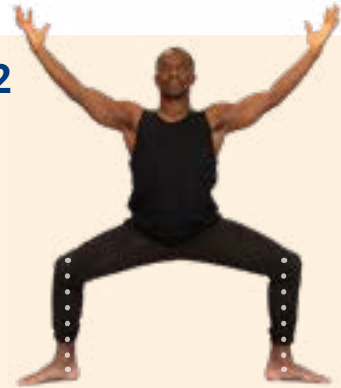
1



Hip Circles

- Stand tall, feet a comfortable distance apart
- Bend your knees, with your hands on hips
- Circle slowly as you breathe
- For 1 to 5 times in each direction

2



Wide Squat

- Step feet wide, point toes out so it is more comfortable
- Drop down into squat
- Keep knees inside (or over) ankles
- What is it like to stay here for 1 to 5 breaths?

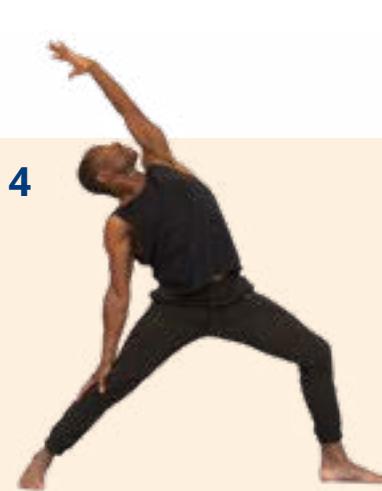
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Warrior 2

- Turn right toes out, left foot inward
- Face direction of front foot
- Check your hips are facing sideways
- How does it feel to stay for 1 to 5 breaths?

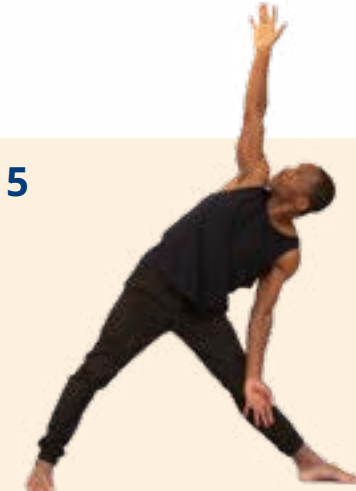
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Reverse Warrior

- Raise front arm, palm facing behind you
- Slide back hand down back leg
- Stay strong through legs
- Stay between 1 to 5 breaths

5



Triangle

- Straighten front leg, reach top arm towards front leg
- Rest front hand on inner leg
- Back hand on hips, or raise up
- Try keeping your chest open, chest and back long

Tips

- Notice the feeling in your feet
- Keep knees slightly bent
- Choose to have your arms raised (see pictures), or hands on hips
- Try 1 to 5 breaths in each posture
- Build up time gradually
- Reduce distance between feet for comfort

Cautions

- Warm up well by moving your major joints
- Stop if any pain or it does not feel right for you
- Avoid if suffering with a hernia, high blood pressure or injury
- Avoid positions 7 and 9 if you suffer with high or low blood pressure

6



Extended Side Angle

- Bend front knee
- Rest forearm on upper leg
- Reach arm overhead, or hand on hip
- How does it feel to keep your chest open?

7

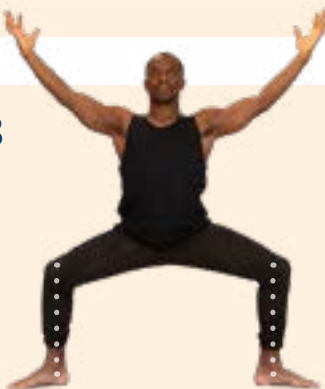


Wide Leg Forward Bend

- Reach to ground, bend knees to help
- Turn toes in, keep knees softly bent
- Fold from hips, keep back long

To come up: bring heels in, place hands on thighs, and push into legs and feet

8



Wide Squat

- Toes point out a bit
- Drop down into squat
- Keep knees inside (or over) ankles

Repeat postures 2 to 8, leading with the other leg in front, as many times as feels comfortable

9



Ragdoll

- Step your feet to a comfortable width apart
- Try having your knees a little bent
- Lower upper body over legs
- Allow upper body to hang downwards
- Keep your neck soft

10



Rest and Reflect

- Lying on back, have knees bent
- You might like to use a pillow or blanket under your head
- How does your breathing feel in your belly?
- Stay for a minute or more

“With humility (an open heart and mind) we embrace the sacred study of Yoga”

Nischala Joy Devi, from her translation and commentary on Yoga Sutra 1.1

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The National Newspaper for Prisoners & Ex-prisoners

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

Breathing for Calm

by Chris

- Calms and balances an agitated mind
- Helps release stress
- Repeat this cycle for 5 to 10 rounds
- Start and finish through your LEFT nostril

"I closed my eyes and breathed in and breathed out."

It is ecstasy to breathe if you are at home in the world."

Paul Durcan, poet. From Windfall, 8 Parnell Hill, Cork

Before you start sigh out of your mouth 3 times



- 1**
- Block right nostril
 - Breathe in through your left nostril

- 2**
- Block left nostril
 - Release right nostril to breathe out



- 4**
- Block right nostril
 - Release left to breathe out through left nostril



- 3**
- Keep left nostril blocked
 - Breathe in through right nostril

This is one round. Repeat this cycle for 5 to 10 times

Tips:

- Blow your nose before you start
- Sit on a chair or edge of bed to be upright and comfortable
- Breathe softly and steadily
- Try and breathe in and out for the same amount of time

Cautions:

- If you feel dizzy or unwell stop and breathe naturally
- Do not do after a heavy meal
- Always start and finish breathing through your left nostril



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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 on supporters' kindness and financial generosity 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.