

Inner Compass



Welcome

Fresh back from our prison yoga teacher training weekend, I am left with a lasting impression of how important our inner wisdom is as a guide and compass for our life's direction and engagement with ourselves and others. Beyond this, it also informs the whole way we experience our life. This applies to us all, whether we are yoga teachers, people practising in prison, prison staff – everyone, anywhere. This is a very important underlying element that makes such a difference to people. Showing up as our whole selves with compassion and clarity came up time and time again in the talks our speakers gave about their experiences living and working in prison.

A former prisoner speaks from her heart when she says: "Just know that your life can change, it can become a good life, a kind life. You have to do that work to make it happen." Read more on page 3.

From HMP Barlinnie,

"[meditation] has allowed me to cut through the fog of nonsense"

See page 3

What is this 'work'? It is to reconnect all the parts that have become disconnected or clouded in the chaos of life. This reconnection happens naturally when we spend time practising meditation or yoga. Not focussing on an outcome but just gently dedicating time each day. Little by little, or suddenly, we notice we are feeling kinder to ourselves and others.

Continue reading on page 5

Love from us all

Selina, Chris, Lou, Padmakumara, Rebecca, 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 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:

Competition Winners!

Our new festive card designs revealed

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Seated Yoga

Yoga poses for small spaces

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Letters

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

From HMP Barlinnie

Yoga wise: I was mentioning the pace of Sun Salutations before – I have fallen in to a “habit” of holding poses for 5 breaths (apart from Extended Mountain). My alarm goes off at 6am so I get two complete rotations done in the 20 minutes before they open us up. At the weekend I do the *Clearing the Head* CD in the hour over lunch break. I tried doing it at night last weekend just before bed and I guess it was nice but because I fell asleep so quickly I did not get to really appreciate the rest after the yoga, if you get what I mean.

Meditation has given me an increased self-awareness. *It has allowed me to cut through the fog of nonsense* in many areas, from the crazy marketing-driven excesses of modern living to my own acceptances of society. Meditation has been helpful in developing that clarity, alongside the Buddhism lessons and ideas.

From HMP Stafford

Meditation and yoga help me to stay calm inside and out. *It also helps me to think clearly, in general everyday life and to reduce my offending risk loads and loads.* I am definitely a better person for it all and more.

From HMP Low Newton

I started yoga to help with a back problem I had at the time (yoga has helped me heal). Then I started meditating and find it such a great benefit for mental health. It calms my nerves and helps my mind to be still. I feel recharged after my sessions.

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



Unnamed

Alongside exercising both in the yard and in the gym, I have found that the yoga practices published in the June/July issues of *Inside Time* have been a great benefit to me. They are helping me to relax and reduce my stress, anger, anxiety, and depression levels, which is in turn helping me on my road to recovery.

I have been an addict for 18 years and am now 6 weeks clean. Which makes me elated to say as I thought there was not any way out of the lifestyle I was living. However, being away from everything and focusing on my recovery, my health (physical and mental) has allowed me to gain clarity and know/see that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

I am neurodivergent, am distracted and triggered easily, so therefore I need to fill my time constructively which I do by reading, writing, exercising, eating well, and practising yoga. I am progressing towards a better lifestyle and am being kinder to myself as each day goes by which is slowly allowing me to love myself.

I forgot how good it felt to be kind to myself, I feel like a new man. *I have not changed who I am, just stripped away all I had become in order to find myself again.*



Artwork from HMP Guys Marsh
(Runner Up in Festive card design competition)

From Onward Life

I am an ex-prisoner and recovered drug user. I served 2 of a 4-year prison sentence for supplying Class A drugs and The PPT provided me with a book and would respond to my letters with inspiration and encouragement for my meditation practice. The time was the 1980's and the prison system was not as chaotic as it is now. For me my prison sentence and how I used it was a saving grace.

Since my time in prison until the present day, The PPT has encouraged me and inspired me through the times that have been brilliant and difficult.

The PPT have never judged me, they have only supported me and inspired me. When there was no one else there who practised yoga and meditation, the PPT writer *carried me through in the cup of their hand to today.*

Prison is how you use it, as an opportunity to get your life together or to become your number rather than your name and your human-ness.

I now lead a simple life, gone are the days of chaos and insecurity about my future.

Just know that your life can change, it can become a good life, a kind life. You have to do that work to make it happen.

People who practise at HMP East Sutton Park let us know how yoga helps:

- I can use yoga biologically to *improve my health* and backpain.
- I can use the yoga breath work psychologically to *calm me down when suffering* with PTSD and flashbacks.
- I can use yoga socially when I feel awkward.

From HMP Risley

Meditation and Religion (I am CofE) have become very important to me, they are totally complementary. One helps and aids the other. You can be deprived of books and they can be restricted, but *the two things no one can deprive you of are your faith and your mind.* However bad things get, you always have those two things.

And the winners are...

The excellent quality of your competition entries has brought us joy. **We would like to say a huge “Thank You” to everyone** who took the time to create and submit their artwork.

We have chosen 4 winning designs. 2 will be used for our 2024 collection, and 2 will be used next year. All winners will receive prizes.



2024

From HMP Eastwood Park



From HMP Moorland



From HMP Haverigg



From HMP Whatton

2025

Festive cards



A pack of 10 cards

Designed by artists at HMP Moorland and HMP Eastwood Park.

£7 includes postage.

Order your festive cards here

Please send me _____ packs of cards (£7 per pack, including postage).

I will contact my prison finance department to send £_____ payable to The Prison Phoenix Trust (if in custody).

I enclose £_____ payable to The Prison Phoenix Trust (if staff).

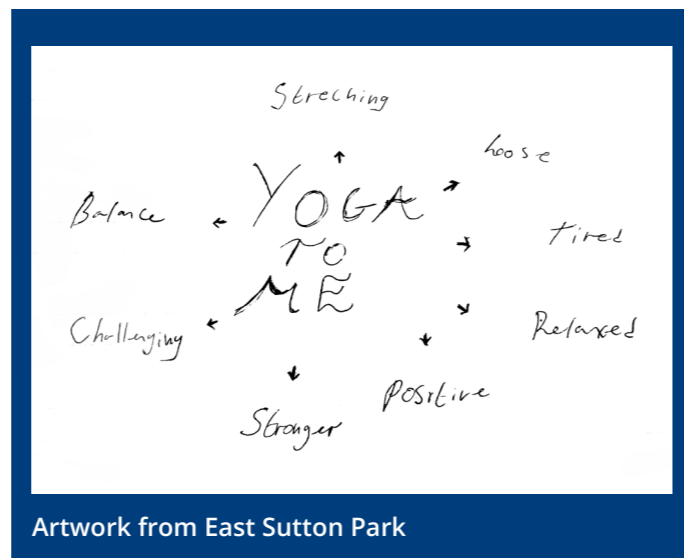
Name _____

Prison number (if in custody) _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Return to: The Prison Phoenix Trust
PO Box 328, Oxford OX2 7HF



Artwork from East Sutton Park

From HMP Inverness

I have met with your yoga instructors within a Rehabilitation Centre and within HMP. I have enjoyed the sessions and found them really beneficial. I am keen to get back into this sport of spiritual mindedness as I struggle with depression and anxiety and the yoga has really helped me cope in the past.

From HMP Parc

If you do not keep up with the meditation practice, I have noticed it gets harder to get back to the point you reached with continued practice. It is like with anything, if you do not do it for a while you have to get back into it and practise harder to achieve the level you were previously at. So I do try to keep in the practice, for that reason. I know if my motivation drops and I do not practise, I may (but doubt it would get to this stage) feel when practising further that it is too difficult to get back to my previous level and give up or just become more demotivated doing it all and have to start from a much lower position to get back.

Unnamed

I am in the segregation unit which although might seem unfortunate, I actually prefer as I like the quiet and time to reflect, although at the moment it is very unpeaceful!!! I have dabbled with yoga through the years, but nothing regular, though now I am making an effort to practise every day. I am starting with the Sun Salutation which helps me a great deal.

Inner Compass

Continued from page 1

Like one writer on page 2 says: "I forgot how good it felt to be kind to myself, I feel like a new man. I have not changed who I am, just stripped away all I had become to find myself again."

At different times of life, we might all feel we have lost our way. When feeling chaos in our heads we want some relief from this. "Meditation has allowed me to cut through the fog of nonsense," says a writer from HMP Barlinnie. Yoga unites our mind, body, and sense of spirit. This might not make any sense at the outset, but in my own experience of healing from disconnect and hearing from others about theirs, it is about finding a way to reconnect. We can see from those who write in what a difference this makes on the road to recovery.

Many faith traditions also reference the importance of connecting to inner experience. Guru Nanak in the Sikh tradition emphasises a holistic approach to spirituality that includes nurturing a loving and devoted heart. Psalm 16:11 in the Bible states, "You make known to me the path of life." In the Quran, "Sirat al-Mustaqim" is understood to mean the path that leads to God.

Unclouding our inner compass by reconnecting to our heart can feel like we have reset. Life feels clearer, more at ease, and kinder. Thank you to everyone for sharing your experiences encouraging others to find their way.



Selina

Editor
Director, The Prison Phoenix Trust

Top Tips

Yoga with Arthritis

Joint Pain? Try this:

Medical studies say that physical activity is an essential part of the effective treatment / management of arthritis.

1. Practise little and often. Start with a few minutes each day.
2. Begin with small and slow movements. Notice how it feels.
3. Use a chair or a folded pillow for more comfort.
4. Gently circle feet and hands to mobilise wrist and ankle joints.
5. Pick one posture or stretch that appeals to you.
6. Listen to your body and do not do more than you can tolerate.



Image credit: Direct Media, Stocksnap, edited and printed under Creative Commons License.

Yoga **Yoga in a chair** by Chris

You do not need special equipment or lots of space to do yoga. Try this sequence of spine movements sitting in a chair or on the edge of your bed.



1 Sit upright
Can you feel your sit-bones on your seat?
Can you feel your feet on the floor?
Breathe in and out steadily.



2 Round back
Tuck your tailbone and drop your chin.



3 Arch back
Roll weight towards front of sit-bones.
Lift heart and look up.
Repeat this and the previous step (Round Back) 5 times.



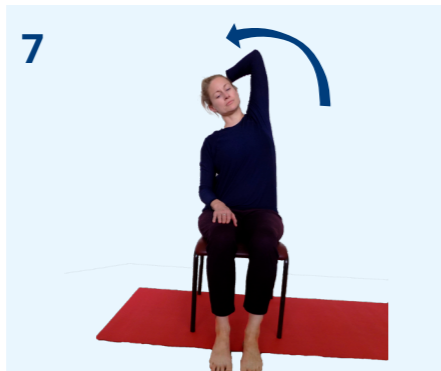
4 Side bend (a)
Place left hand on back of head.



5 Side bend (b)
Lift left elbow to stretch out that side.



6 Side bend (c)
Place right hand on back of head.



7 Side bend (d)
Lift right elbow to stretch out other side.
Repeat both side stretches 5 times.



8 Twist (a)
Turn upper body to left, placing right hand on left leg.



9 Twist (b)
Turn upper body to right, placing left hand on right knee.
Repeat the twist on both sides 5 times.



10 Sit upright
Notice what you feel in your body.
Stay for 5 or more slow, steady breaths.

“Hope is the companion of power, and mother of success; for who so hopes strongly has within him the gift of miracles.”

insidetime
the National Newspaper for Prisoners & Detainees

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

Cautions

- Move within your pain-free range. If something hurts, stop and breathe.
- Use the muscles around your waist when twisting rather than levering with your arms.
- If you have osteoporosis, do smaller movements, not the maximum range.
- Spine or disc problems, or hernia check with healthcare before you try this.

Tips

- Put books or pillow under feet if they do not easily rest on the floor.
- Move with awareness. Each time you change position, can you notice what you feel in your body?
- If you like, try moving in time with your breath.

by Lou

- **Helps calm and quieten the mind**
- **Builds inner strength**

1. Sit upright, back straight.
2. Rest your hands on your lap.
3. Try to breathe gently through your nose.
4. Notice and feel the solid ground beneath you. It is always there.
5. Eyes softly gazing downwards.
6. Let go of expectation. Breathe naturally. Just observe.
7. Start for 1 minute, then build this up gradually.



Cautions

- If you have PTSD, depression, or are experiencing flashbacks, check with your mental health team first.
- Stop if troubling thoughts arise.
- Do not practise under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

IMPORTANT: If troubling thoughts flood in or you feel anxious:

- Push feet or hands into the ground.
- Look around you, notice things in the room.

If it overwhelms you, wait until you feel more stable.

Tips

- Sit on a chair. Or sit / kneel on the floor on a folded pillow or blanket.
- A few yoga postures first may help settle and relax your mind and body.
- Start by counting your breaths. In 1 and out 2, and repeat.
- When you are distracted, be kind to yourself. Do not worry. Return to your breath.
- It may not feel peaceful or calm at all. With gradual practice, it might.

“I have begun to think of life as a series of ripples widening out from an original center.”

Seamus Heaney, Irish Poet



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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 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 Lynette Evans and Shirley Ralph.