

WCCM Prison Toolkit



A Guide to Setting Up and Running

Prison Meditation Groups

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Section 1

Introduction

There are approximately *11.5 million people in prison in the world* (*source: World Prison Population List Oct 2021*), *2 million of which (17%) are held in US prisons* which has the highest prison population in the world based on the number of prisoners per 100,000 of population.

The purposes of prison worldwide are threefold:

* To protect the public from the most dangerous and violent individuals
* To punish by depriving offenders of their liberty and certain freedoms enjoyed by the rest of society and thereby act as a deterrent
* To rehabilitate and reduce the risk of reoffending by providing offenders with the opportunity to reflect on, and take responsibility for, their crimes and prepare them for a law-abiding life when they are released.

The extract below is from the UK Social Exclusion Report published over 20 years ago in July 2002 ‘Reducing Re-offending by Ex-Prisoners’. My background is in education, in particular the development of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, and it was this report that prompted me to join the UK prison service in 2003 in the hope I could make a difference helping to improve education and employment prospects for prisoners in the UK.

*‘Many prisoners have experienced a lifetime of social exclusion. Compared with the general*

*population, prisoners are thirteen times as likely to have been in care as a child, thirteen times*

*as likely to be unemployed, ten times as likely to have been a regular truant, two and a half*

*times as likely to have had a family member convicted of a criminal offence, six times as likely to*

*have been a young father, and fifteen times as likely to be HIV positive.*

*Many prisoners’ basic skills are very poor. 80 per cent have the writing skills, 65 per cent the*

*numeracy skills and 50 per cent the reading skills at or below the level of an 11-year-old child.*

*60 to 70 per cent of prisoners were using drugs before imprisonment. Over 70 per cent*

*suffer from at least two mental disorders. And 20 per cent of male and 37 per cent of female*

*sentenced prisoners have attempted suicide in the past. The position is often even worse for*

*18–20-year-olds, whose basic skills, unemployment rate and school exclusion background are*

*all over a third worse than those of older prisoners.*

*Despite high levels of need, many prisoners have effectively been excluded from access to services*

*in the past. It is estimated that around half of prisoners had no GP before they came into custody;*

*prisoners are over twenty times more likely than the general population to have been excluded*

*from school; and one prison drugs project found that although 70 per cent of those entering the*

*prison had a drug misuse problem, 80 per cent of these had never had any contact with drug*

*treatment services.*

*There is a considerable risk that a prison sentence might actually make the factors associated with*

*re-offending worse. For example, a third lose their house while in prison, two-thirds lose their*

*job, over a fifth face increased financial problems and over two-fifths lose contact with their*

*family. There are also real dangers of mental and physical health deteriorating further, of life and*

*thinking skills being eroded, and of prisoners being introduced to drugs. By aggravating the factors*

*associated with re-offending, prison sentences can prove counter-productive as a contribution to*

*crime reduction and public safety.’ Ref: pages 6-7*



I imagine this is a similar if not worse situation in prisons around the world. I’m very sad to say that in 2023, over 20 years after the SEU report was written I don’t think much has changed. I left the prison service in 2019 but currently continue to inspect prisons for the independent prison inspection body His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons in England and Wales. The most recent inspection reports also reveal how little real progress has been made.

As stated previously one of the purposes of prison is to reduce the risk of reoffending however recent UK reoffending data shows:

• 25% of all offenders within 12 months of release reoffend

• 54% of adults who were released from a prison sentence of less than 12 months reoffend

• 31% of adults in general reoffend

• 47% of young black offenders (aged 18-21) reoffend

• 39% of young white offenders reoffend

• 31% of juvenile offenders aged 10-17 reoffend

(Source: Ministry of Justice, GOV.UK)

Research continually states what’s needed to solve the problem of offending - the importance of good parenting, early socialisation, schooling and social bonds. However, if people are living in deprived and disorganised neighbourhoods this is a huge challenge. There’s also a wealth of evidence that links offending both to drug and alcohol misuse. 60-70% of offenders use drugs or alcohol before entering UK prisons. There are rehabilitation treatment programmes in prisons however of those offenders in UK prisons undergoing treatment only 30% complete it. Moreover, rehabilitation is not always the answer as 40-60% of people who undergo treatment, whether in prison or the community, relapse. Reasons for relapse include emotional stress and depression, exhaustion and sleeplessness and isolation - a lack of support and community.

(Sources: GOV.UK, Scottish Government, Drugabuse.com, UK-rehab.com)

Prisons are failing to truly rehabilitate offenders. Meditation we believe can. Prisoners and prison staff may be familiar with the 12-step programme for Alcoholics and Addicts which are offered in many prisons. There are 12 Steps and 12 Traditions in the programme and Tradition 3 of Alcoholics Anonymous states that ‘The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking’ *however the only requirement for membership of a WCCM meditation group is a desire to stop thinking!*

Section 2

Why offer meditation in prisons?

Prisoners’ testimonies

Metanoia, the WCCM theme in for 2023 translates as ‘Let your minds be remade’. Incarceration is a huge challenge to mind, body and soul. Meditation provides a way through the darkness, transforming the mind and healing body and soul. Prisoners’ testimonies are the most powerful advocate for offering meditation in prisons.

James Bishop, Benedictine Oblate, author, meditator and former WCCM International Prisons Co-ordinator learnt to meditate in a US prison whilst serving a long sentence. He wrote: *‘Through the Rule and through meditation, I have come to know that I was in a self-made prison for many years, and when I was finally sent to a physical prison, I became freer than I had ever been in my life’* from ‘A Way in the Wilderness: A Commentary on the Rule of Benedict for the Physically and Spiritually Imprisoned’ by James Bishop, Continuum 2012

Max, a prisoner and meditator at HMP Glenochil in Scotland compared prison to a monastery*:*

*‘Even though this place is a cacophony, it is in many ways a great opportunity. This is my place of practice, my monastery, and I must learn to embrace it fully.’* From ‘Peace Inside: A Prisoner’s Guide to Meditation’ edited by Sam Settle, Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2017

Frank, a prisoner in the US writes *‘I see what meditation does every time I talk to Cat, a friend of mine who locks down on our gallery. He used to be very wild and violent. Now he is calm and just by speaking to him my tension eases. He’s one of the most sincerest persons I have ever met’*. From ‘We’re all Doing Time’ by Bo Lozoff, Prison Phoenix Trust 2010

Jonny, a prisoner at Donaldson prison, Alabama, US wrote about the impact of the Vipassana meditation programme he took part in there on his life: *‘I’ve got life without parole and there is a strong possibility I will never get out of here. I was always seeking to escape. My life was in constant turmoil. I started seeing ways of being okay with being locked up, being okay with maybe never getting out of here. I can now say that I am okay with my situation spiritually and mentally. I still struggle, but I am not so caught up with whether I am going to get out. I credit that a lot to what I learned in the Vipassana course. This is like freedom you know. It’s like setting me free.’* From Letters from the Dhamma Brothers by Jenny Phillips, Pariyatti Press 2008

Donna, former prisoner at HMP Styal prison and drug addict, changed her life around through meditation. After her release she trained to become a Senior Drug Dependency Worker helping others with their addiction. *‘Through meditation I saw the benefits of practice and these outweighed the destabilisation of drugs; I no longer wanted the chaos and inconsistencies.’* From ‘Peace Inside: A Prisoner’s Guide to Meditation’ edited by Sam Settle, Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2017

The final testimony is from Jonathan Aitken, a former politician and MP in Margaret Thatcher’s government in the UK imprisoned in 1989 for 18 months for perjury. As a result of his prison experience, he studied theology and became an Anglian priest and prison chaplain. I am not aware if he is a meditator, but he wrote two books about his prison experience, and below are extracts from ‘Doing Time: A Spiritual Survival Guide’ by Jonathan Aitken & Edward Smyth, Lion Books 2021

*‘Prison is not a bad place to explore the part of your being that is called the soul’*

*‘Society likes not to think about its prisons all that often; people of faith can and should do better*’ – a call to people of faith to support prisoners.

Unified Consciousness

The December 2021 dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Father Laurence focussed on the ‘oneness’ of the world, of humanity, our nations and our communities. The Dalai Lama stressed the importance of education over intellect, the teaching of warm heartedness, of love and compassion – a universal matter in a secular world – in order to create a better, healthier, happier and peaceful world in which *religious traditions can assist in a number of ways for example through meditation.*

In discussions about prison meditation with Father Laurence at Bonnevaux in November 2021, we agreed the focus should be *on ensuring inclusivity in prison meditation and the promotion of the positive, evidence-based, holistic benefits of meditation and of the origins of meditation across many wisdom traditions including the Christian tradition.*

WCCM Prison Meditation Groups

There are currently about 120 countries in the WCCM with hundreds of groups running in the community however a 2022 survey of Prison Meditation Group (*ref Section 8 a.i)* has shown to our knowledge there were just 5 countries with WCCM prison meditation groups and 10 groups active in 2022. They were Australia (4 groups), Italy (1 group), Trinidad & Tobago (zoom group for 6 prisons), the USA (2 groups) and the UK (some 1-1 in 2 prisons).

The prison harvest is plentiful but the workers are few! So why are there so few prison meditation groups? From talking to a number of meditators, there are a variety of possible reasons as to why there aren’t more WCCM prison meditation groups. This includes fear of the unknown, a lack of experience or knowledge of working with prisoners and within the prison system, not knowing how to approach prisons initially and establish a group as well as a lack of confidence or anxiety about personal ability to cope.

WCCM prison meditation groups have typically been established and supported through prison chaplaincies within the secular setting of prison. The WCCM aim for prisons is to expand the number of prison groups and vary approaches into prisons, with a focus on the benefits that meditation brings to a wider audience of prisoners as well as to prison staff. This is supported by resources and training aimed at WCCM members interested in setting up a prison meditation groups as well as existing prison group leaders. This toolkit provides the information and support to hopefully encourage you to break into more prisons!

Section 3

Research on Meditation in Prisons

Several prison meditators have asked for research evidence to support the case for offering meditation in prisons. Detailed below is some specific research on the benefits of meditation in prisons and research on the benefits of mantra-based meditation to a group of healthcare professionals. Prison staff as well as prisoners will of course benefit from meditation so you may wish to also offer meditation for prison staff too. They could also become excellent advocates for meditation.

A. ‘A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Yoga and Mindfulness Meditation in Prison: Effects on Psychological Well-Being and Behavioural Functioning’ by Katherine M. Auty, Aiden Cope, and Alison Liebling. The extracts in italics below are from the 2015 article and also highlighted in yellow on the pdf of the article.



*Prison is undoubtedly a stressful environment for many inmates. Several research studies provide evidence that yoga and meditation programs may provide specific benefits to directly address the negative effects of imprisonment. In vulnerable and clinical samples, there is growing evidence that yoga and meditation programs aid in reducing negative affect, depression, and anxiety (Banerjee et al., 2007; Michalsen et al., 2005; Sharma & Haider, 2013; Vadiraja et al., 2009) and improving emotional well-being (Moadel et al., 2007). Some studies also show that programs can lead to lower levels of stress (Bilderbeck, Farias, Brazil, Jakobowitz, & Wikholm, 2013) and increases in sustained attention (Rangan, Nagendra, & Bhatt, 2009) Ref: Page 3*

*Theoretical Basis of Prison Yoga and Meditation Programs*

*The role of religion and spirituality in prison life is often controversial but their importance is acknowledged (Goodwin, 2001) while spirituality is being increasingly recognised as a component of one’s general health and well-being. Although there is considerable overlap between the two terms, spirituality and religion are not necessarily synonymous. Religion refers to the texts, teachings, and practice of organised faiths, whereas spirituality refers to a broader conception of personal development, the search for meaning, and pursuit of inner tranquillity. The rehabilitative aspect of incarceration is reliant on a certain element of personal growth and self-integration, which is highly compatible with the goal of yoga and meditation practice. Being imprisoned leaves individuals with a great deal of time in which to reflect on their lives. It is possible that yoga and meditation practice can help to guide an individual in using this self-reflective time in a positive and rewarding manner. Ref Pages 3-4*

*Similarly, studies have shown a cumulative and lasting effect on attention tasks from meditation training (Tang et al., 2007), which could improve prisoners’ ability to engage with courses and*

*education programs during their sentence. Ref page 5*

*The potential benefits of yoga and meditation practice extend beyond those with psychological and physical health problems, diagnosed or otherwise. Prison is a difficult environment, and prisoners must come to terms with a range of painful and stressful experiences including loss of control, family contact, privacy, status, and safety (Crewe, 2007; Liebling, 1999). The loss of family life, liberty, and the fear of decay and deterioration are particularly painful experiences for prisoners (e.g., S. Cohen & Taylor, 1972), all of which can further rumination. Equally, strained relationships with staff and other prisoners can lead to a tense living environment. Yoga and meditation practices can help individuals to better understand and cope with difficult situations and emotions and so have the potential to improve both interpersonal relationships and psychological well-being. Ref Page 5*

b. Dr Barry White, WCCM contributor and meditator, conducted a systematic review with medical colleagues in 2018 entitled ‘Mantra meditation for mental health in the general population’, the results of which were published in an article below along with the Conclusion (copied below)



*4.4. Conclusion There is some evidence that mantra meditation can improve mental health related outcomes in the general, non-clinical population, however this evidence is based on individual studies of poor quality. As such, the efficacy of mantra meditation as a mechanism that provides relief from stress and a basis for more dynamic and effective activity should not be overstated at this time. Despite the poor quality of studies reviewed, positive trends are evident which suggests that such programmes may have exciting educational, occupational and psychotherapeutic potential, offering the general population an individual approach that avoids the side effects of medications, the stigma of treatment as well as barriers related to issues of cost and accessibility. Larger trials of superior quality are required to draw more definite conclusions.*

This review then led Dr Barry White and colleagues to draw up a research protocol and conduct some further research by designing and delivering a mantra-based meditation programme with the support of Father Laurence Freeman, to healthcare professionals in the emergency department of a Dublin hospital. The protocol and findings are attached below *‘Burnout in the emergency department: Randomized controlled trial of an attention-based training program’*

 

The trial concluded that *‘The results described in this study suggest that an ABT – Attention Based Training program (mantra meditation) represents a viable option to limit burnout (specifically EE- emotional exhaustion) among emergency staff. We believe a 59% chance (probability of superiority) of an improvement in EE for ABT participants is a significant result’.*

Section 4

How to decide if running a prison meditation group is for you

Prisons are unique environments, challenging but rewarding with no two prisons the same. The context of a prison meditation group is of course different to a group in the community. Prisoners are likely to be more diverse in almost every way compared to the average group on the outside - diverse in age, race, class, employment, state of mental health, beliefs and behavioural norms.  But in other ways they are much the same; people come to try it out and some take to it, others don't. They have the same challenges and experiences meditating as in outside groups - distractions of course, good experiences, difficult experiences, surprising experiences. Many prison group facilitators have found that prisoners are often prepared to be more honest and direct than on the outside. And remember, prisoners are generally very appreciative that you have come in to offer something for them.

WCCM prison group leaders new to prisons will of course develop awareness and understanding over time of the prison context. This includes the unique challenges prisoners face, the importance of security, an acceptance of the built environment and its limitations and the inevitable disruptions where sessions can be cancelled without prior notice or there are no prison staff to enable prisoners to attend the group.

*Qu: One of the first questions you should ask yourself if you are considering running a prison meditation group is what are your motives?* If it’s an unhealthy fascination with prison and criminals or a desire to ‘do good’ so that you feel good then think again! Prisoners will soon vote with their feet.

Suggested reading on prison and useful weblinks

If you have previous experience and knowledge of prisons in any capacity, you will have an idea of what to expect however if you don’t it’s advisable to do some research and also learn from those who have experience.

1. General prison information
2. <https://www.prisonstudies.org/>

A very informative online database with information on prisons and the use of imprisonment in countries around the world

1. <https://www.prison-insider.com/en>

This is a very useful website with information about prison systems in countries around the world. There is a translation tool to translate into the language of your choice and a world map to click on the country you want to view.

Types of prisons and prison systems

It’s important to be aware of the different types of prison and prisons system in your country. *Do you have any preference for facilitating meditation groups with males, females or young offenders. What about type of prison?* Prisoners are given a security category based on:

* how likely they are to try to escape
* their risk of causing harm to other prisoners and prison staff

Prison systems and management vary between countries as well as prison types. In all countries however there will be maximum, medium and minimum security prisons and separate prisons for men, women and young offenders. For example:

England & Wales



USA

The US prison system is more complex than the UK system – here’s some links to explain prison types and differences between federal and state prisons.

https://blog.globaltel.com/types-of-prisons-in-the-us/

<https://legalbeagle.com/8214304-main-between-state-federal-corrections.html>

*Also ask yourself: Would you feel comfortable working with all types of prisoners regardless of their crime?* If not, communicate this to the prison in initial discussions.

Section 5

Getting started: how to initially approach a prison

So, once you’ve decided you would like to establish a prison meditation group, here’s some suggested next steps:

1. Research: Find out about the criminal justice and prison system in your country (Ref: Section 4) <https://www.prison-insider.com/en> [Prisons by country - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisons_by_country)

<https://www.prisonstudies.org/>

IMPORTANT – each country and prison system may have different views regarding delivering meditation from a secular or faith-based approach and it’s very important to understand in advance what the prison system in your country will allow. However, some prisons may also decide to act autonomously in their decision.

Read ‘The Missing Peace’ 2022 Review of WCCM prison groups

WCCM Review of Meditation in Prisons – a review of current and former prison meditation groups. It may be also be helpful to talk to someone already doing it - contact details available on request from Mary Devane, WCCM International & UK Meditation in Prisons Co-ordinator, [mary@wccm.org](mailto:mary@wccm.org)



1. Location and type of prison: find the nearest prison/s to you by google search - how far away is it from you and what type of prison/s? If it is a remand or local prison where prisoners go first before being sentenced, prisoners will not typically stay very long before being moved on to another prison. The length of time prisoners stay in the prison will affect how you run and manage the group and may be a consideration in your choice.
2. Commitment: be realistic It’s important to remember prisoners have been let down constantly, so don’t over commit, and structure the prison’s expectations as to what you can commit to. A weekly meeting is ideal, if not a fortnightly meeting – can you offer daytime or evening? Typically, meditation sessions are an hour, plus factor in your travel time to the prison and the time for you to get into and out of the prison. Also, how will you get there? If driving, is there parking? Ensure you have a named prison link person.
3. Facilitator/s: If you are planning to deliver meditation in person in prison will you be the sole facilitator or do you have a co-facilitator which means you have backup if ill or on holiday.
4. Meditation via technology: If you are unable to go into prisons, consider and explore how you might offer meditation sessions and teaching using technology. For example, prison meditation in Trinidad is delivered online via zoom into 6 prisons – further information below on this in Section 7e. Some prisons use video links to the outside. Other prisons have their own dedicated in-cell TV channel or radio network, some have secure prison laptops available for individual use in cells or Virtual Learning Platforms accessed by computers in education department classrooms and libraries– all of these have the potential to deliver pre-recorded meditation sessions via DVD.
5. Initial contact: You may already have a contact in the prison and if so ask your contact the best way to approach the prison. If not, find out the name of the Governor/Warden/Head of the prison/s you are willing to work with by searching on the internet, or emailing or telephoning the prison. Once you have a *contact name and email (or address)* email/send the Letter of Introduction from Father Laurence- see attachment below *(Ask your National or Prison Co-ordinator regarding translation into your languages)*. It’s best to *email the letter with a covering email* on the same email from you requesting an initial meeting. It's very possible that your email will be forwarded on to the head or manager in another department of the prison e.g. Head of Chaplaincy, Head of Reducing Reoffending/Programmes. Head of Activities etc. Prisons are busy places, staff change and things go astray *so be persistent and follow up if no reply after a week, and follow up again if necessary.*



1. Initial Meeting: Hopefully your email and letter will trigger an initial meeting or discussion either online or the telephone but ideally face to face if possible – this will be with whoever the prison suggests (as above this could be the main Governor/Warden, the Head of Reducing Re-offending/Activities, the Head of Chaplaincy). If it’s a face-to-face meeting inside the prison, you will be asked to provide ID for security purposes – usually passport, driving licence, proof of address. When you visit make sure you don’t bring in any restricted items. These are usually mobile phones and electronic devices. In maximum security prisons, many more items will be prohibited e.g. metal items – so you may need special permission to bring in a metal gong. If you are unsure ask the prison before your visit.

Here’s a suggested initial meeting plan.



1. Next steps: Hopefully your initial meeting will result in the opportunity to run a 35/40- minute taster session/s for prisoners and/or staff. Agree day, time, location for taster session and what you need prison to provide – chairs, gong or CD player for gong CD (if you have one). Provide promotion material to generate interest for the taster session. See example taster session plan below



To publicise, Clip Art has free graphics to make into promotional posters e.g. [Thought Bubble - ClipArt Best](http://www.clipartbest.com/search?q=thought+bubble) and free photos at <https://pixabay.com/photos/> See 4 example posters FYI

   

1. Security Clearance: Once you have the go-ahead from the prison to start a group, they will inform you what the security clearance process is. For lower category minimum to medium security prisons this should be quite a quick process, however for maximum security prisons the level of security clearance is higher and in the UK for example this can take at least 3 months.

The prison should also arrange security awareness training for you. Often there is a regular training programme delivered you can slot into however if this is not the case ask the prison to provide this for you. Do not start delivering sessions until you have received this training.

Security awareness training will typically cover the following subjects:

* Physical security
* Conditioning by prisoners
* Disclosing your personal information
* Data protection
* Dress
* Safeguarding
* Restricted items

Section 6

Running a prison meditation group:

Setting up, 5 suggested models and evaluation

Setting up

Whilst waiting for your clearance, you will need to agree the start date, time and location of the group and the prison staff who will need to escort you as well as the prisoners to and from the session.

Agree with prison staff how to publicise the group – to whom (all prisoners?) and what publicity material/content. You can adapt/use any previous publicity (posters and leaflets).

How will you publicise – ask prison staff and prisoners what’s the best way. Is it via posters/leaflets and where e.g. different areas of prison on wings, education, library, chaplaincy, gym, corridors.

Consider publicising via electronic means – e.g. in-cell TV sometimes has a local channel, local prison radio or on electronic prison kiosks on wings where prison information is publicised.

Many prisoners struggle to read so think about holding some brief verbal information sessions e.g. education, on wings, in the gym or chaplaincy where the prisoners already are verbally or brief prisoner mentors who work in different prison areas to promote. Remember Prison Meditation is part of the WCCM Meditatio Outreach Programme which promotes a non-religious secular approach, welcoming people of all faiths or none.

Run a course – 5 suggestions. Below are resources you can use to run a prison meditation course. The first three are secular in their approach, with the first two specifically developed for use in prisons, the third is John Main’s radically simple spiritual approach, the 4th is Laurence Freeman’s Christian faith-based course and the 5th is delivering a course using digital multimedia. On completion of the course, you could run the course again with a different cohort and /or continue to run a meditation group with the participants.

1. *In the Stillness of Time* - *Talks for Prisoners* by Allison & Geoff Waterhouse and Michael Bow, CD format – non-religious 12 themed talks that could run as a 12 week course plus 2 talks ‘How to Meditate’ summarising the actual method. Attached is a zip file with the transcripts of each talk.

Talks

1. The Mantra – A Simple Word
2. Simplicity and Difficulty
3. The Body – why do we sit?
4. The Monkey Mind
5. Without Expectation
6. Stillness at the centre
7. Finding Joy/Finding Peace
8. Growing in Love
9. Who are you and do you want to find out?
10. Becoming who we are called to be
11. Making meditation a daily practice
12. In the Stillness of Time
13. How to Meditate – Long Introduction
14. How to Meditate – Short introduction



1. *Finding Freedom* by Terry Doyle, CD/DVD (& Crib notes) – secular approach aimed at young male prisoners however could be used with any prisoners - male or female. There are 7 talks so could be run over 7 weeks.

Talks

1. My journey to meditation
2. Cooling the flames of anger
3. The power of presence
4. Dealing with anxiety and overwhelm
5. Meditate to be free
6. Living what you have learned
7. Movement as meditation



1. *Radical Simplicity* – *Meditation for Everyone* by John Main, book & CD with a foreword and introduction to each chapter by Laurence Freeman. There are 12 chapters so could use as basis for 12 sessions/ a 12 week course

Contents:

Meditation - introduction by Laurence Freeman

John Main – information about his life and work

1. How to Meditate
2. Contact with our Spirit
3. The Basic Doctrine
4. Times of Meditation
5. Distractions
6. Spiritual Growth
7. Leaving Ego Behind
8. Free from Ego
9. Selfless Attention
10. Total Potential
11. Detachment from Self-preoccupation
12. Meditation as a Discipline
13. *Six Week Introductory Course – a handbook for presenters* by Laurence Freeman, book Many of the existing WCCM Prison Meditation groups (as detailed in the 2022 review of WCCM Prison Meditation Groups *The Missing Peace)* have been or are led by prison chaplaincy staff and promoted as Christian Meditation - either part of a Christian service or a standalone session using WCCM Christian based materials and Christian texts and teachings. Be aware that a specifically Christian approach, rather than a secular approach for all faiths and none, might deter some prisoners from taking part.

Contents:

1. What is Christian Meditation
2. John Main
3. The roots of meditation in the Christian Tradition
4. The Wheel of Prayer: meditation and other ways of prayer
5. Leaving Self Behind: meditation and discipleship
6. The Fruits of Meditation
7. Digital/Multi-media sessions or course – if you can’t physically access the prison, discuss with the prison how to deliver meditation sessions and teaching remotely or via pre-corded DVD. For example prison meditation in Trinidad is delivered via zoom into 6 prisons – see further information below



Some prisons use video links to the outside. Other prisons have their own dedicated in-cell TV channel or radio network, some have secure prison laptops available for individual use in cells or Virtual Learning Platforms accessed by computers in education department classrooms and libraries– all of these have the potential to deliver pre-recorded meditation sessions via DVD.

1. Post-release group - For prisoners on release who wish to continue their meditation practice they may not feel comfortable joining an existing WCCM on-line or face-to-face group so consider setting up a specific on-line or a face-to-face group for prisoners on release and ex-offenders already in the community. For a face-to-face group you could investigate setting up a group in places where newly released prisoners are located or have contact with for example approved premises (hostels where prisoners are released to), hostels for the homeless e.g. Salvation Army or drug and alcohol addiction rehab centres. For further support and advice contact Terry Doyle, who is the WCCM Meditation Co-ordinator for Meditation for those on the Margins:

[terry-doyle@live.co.uk](mailto:terry-doyle@live.co.uk)

1. Evaluation

All of the WCCM prison group leaders surveyed had anecdotal evidence of the benefits of meditation for prisoners however this was not formally recorded. It’s really helpful to keep a written or audio record of the benefits of meditation experienced by the prisoners and/or prison staff not only for them to reflect on what’s changed but also to encourage other prisoners or staff to take part. In addition these testimonies could be used when promoting meditation to other prisons and to encourage more prison facilitators from the WCCM community. Evaluation could just be a simple before and after questionnaire, or ask the prisoners to write down or verbally record their experience. Be aware some prisoners struggle with reading and writing so always offer to help with any reading or writing where needed. Also be mindful that some prisoners may be wary of completing questionnaires. Explain the purpose of the questionnaire and evaluation and say it won’t be shared unless they give their permission.

Example of a simple questionnaire and evaluation



If there is a psychology department in the prison, you may wish to consider doing more formal research on the benefits on meditation such as that conducted by Dr Barry White on mantra based meditation for healthcare professionals referenced in Chapter 3b the Research section of this document.

Section 7

Ongoing Support & Training

Having a network of support and training for prison outreach is very important as being a prison volunteer can be quite isolating. Here are some ways to connect in:

1. National Community Co-ordinator or Prison Co-ordinator. The WCCM has members in over 120 countries and National Communities in 75 of these countries with National Co-ordinators and in some communities also Prison Co-ordinators. Check the wccm.org website in the Community section to see if your country has a National Community and a National Co-ordinator as this is the best way to get connected to a support system <https://wccm.org/national-communities/>
2. Contact Mary Devane the WCCM Meditatio International Meditation in Prison Co-ordinator [mary@wccm.org](mailto:mary@wccm.org) (she is also the UK Prisons Co-ordinator).
3. Prison Meditation Group Contacts – email [mary@wccm.org](mailto:mary@wccm.org)
4. On-going regular online meetings, forums, training and information .
5. WCCM and other resources and information for prison meditation (see Section 8 below)

Section 8

Further information and resources about meditation in prisons

and prisoners’ experience of the prison system

1. WCCM resources specifically for prison outreach
2. WCCM Review of Meditation in Prisons – a review of current and former prison meditation groups. It’s also helpful to talk to someone doing it - contact details available on request from Mary Devane, WCCM Meditatio International & UK Meditation in Prisons Co-ordinator, [mary@wccm.org](mailto:mary@wccm.org)



1. The WCCM website under the section Outreach: Social Justice has two free talks on meditation in prison by former prisoners and meditators under Talks (& also under Videos & Seminars - Stories from Prison) - Unlocking Freedom & Joy by James Bishop & Daniel Fox.
2. Medio Media, the publishing arm of WCCM has 2 prison meditation talks to buy in [Recent Titles – Medio Media](https://mediomedia.com/collections/recent-titles) (Store on website menu)
3. In the Stillness of Time Talks for Prisoners Audio CD by Allison & Geoff Waterhouse & Michael Bow [In the Stillness of Time – Medio Media](https://mediomedia.com/collections/recent-titles/products/mtstn4) (go to Store on website menu then click on Recent Titles)
4. ‘Finding Freedom - Meditation for Young Men in the Prison System’ by Terry Doyle DVD or Audio CD [Finding Freedom – Medio Media](https://mediomedia.com/collections/recent-titles/products/mtfnd4)
5. The books and resources in this section are about meditating in prisons using the breath not mantra based.
6. ‘Freeing the Spirit through meditation and yoga’ by Sandy Chubb & Sister Elaine MacInnes published by the Prison Phoenix Trust 2017 – a very simple, useful, illustrated guide introducing meditation, how to sit and some basic yoga practices for prisoners.
7. ‘Peace Inside A Prisoner’s Guide to Meditation’ edited by Sam Settle, published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2017 – sections on Meditation and letters from prisoners with replies.
8. ‘We’re All Doing Time’ A guide for getting free by Bo Lozoff, 12th edition published by the Prison Phoenix Trust 2010, 1st edition Hanuman Foundation 1985. 3 sections – background, how to practice meditation and yoga and letters from prisoners and replies.
9. ‘It’s Always Possible’ One Woman’s Transformation of India’s Prison System by Kiran Bedi, 1st edition 1998 published by Himalayan Institute Press – *ref p.192-203 this section is regarding teaching Vispassana meditation in the prison*
10. ‘Letters from the Dhamma Brothers: Meditation Behind Bars’ - by Jenny Phillips, Pariyatti Press 2021

Also Film [The Dhamma Brothers - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dhamma_Brothers) about The Dhamma Brothers and Vipassana Meditation in Donaldson Maximum Security Prison USA

And Ted Talk by Jenny Phillips ‘The Only Way Out Is In’ about the Dhamma Brothers & the Vipassana meditation project in Donaldson Prison USA <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=150cqgYh8sQ>

1. Books & articles written by prisoners with experience of the UK prison system.

There will no doubt be articles or literature written by prisoners who have experienced prison systems in your country so do a google search. There may also be prison newspapers distributed in prisons with articles written by prisoners.

1. ‘A Bit of a Stretch – The Diaries of a Prisoner’ by Chris Atkins, published by Atlantic Books, 2020. Chris, a documentary filmmaker and writer, was sentenced to 5 years for fraud and writes very honestly about his experience of prison.
2. ‘Doing Time: A spiritual survival guide’ by former prisoners, Jonathan Aitken & Edward Smyth, published by Lion Books 2021.
3. Inside Time: The National Newspaper for Prisoners & Detainees (UK) <https://insidetime.org/>
4. Prison Fellowship has built programmes in prisons around the world restoring prisoners' lives, helping their families, and successfully integrating them back into the community

<https://pfi.org> International <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/> - US <https://prisonfellowship.org.uk/> - UK

These guidelines have been devised by Mary Devane. WCCM Meditatio International Coordinator for Prisons.

Mary is currently a freelance Ofsted Inspector of Prisons inspecting education, training and work programmes in prisons in England. She previously worked as a senior manager for the prison service for 16 years leading, managing and supporting education, training and work programmes in a range of prisons across England.

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